ME-GANGSTER

Charles Francis Coe

Henry

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A William Fox Production. *Me-Gangster.*

JIMMY THE KID SUGGESTS A TRIP TO CONEY ISLAND TO NELLIE REGAN.

ME---GANGSTER

BY

CHARLES FRANCIS COE

AUTHOR OF
THE RIVER PIRATE

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY
A WILLIAM FOX PRODUCTION

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The River Pirate Me—Gangster

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With Warm Regard and
Deep Appreciation
I Dedicate This Book
to
BEN AMES WILLIAMS

ME—GANGSTER

I

THE first thing I ever stole was an apple. I stole it from a fruit stand that stood on the corner of the street where I lived. The Italian who owned the fruit stand saw me take the apple. A lot of the kids on the street had been stealing from him and I guess he was pretty mad about it.

I happened to be the first one he chased. He came out of the store and almost caught me before I could get started away. I was not expecting a chase. But I was quick and could run once I got started.

In later days that speed of foot meant a good deal to me. There was one time, in a gang war, when it saved my life. But that is ahead of the story, and if this thing must be told, it ought to be told exactly as it happened. So let's go back to the apple and the Italian.

I was getting away, the apple inside my shirt, when I came to a corner. Just as I went by, a cop turned the square and I ran straight into his arms. I knocked some of the breath out of him, I guess,

but I was just a kid, and not a very big one at that, so it did not hurt him much. But he saw the Italian chasing me and knew that something was wrong. Someone was always being chased along the street where I was born. The cop just threw his big arms around me and held me tight. I squirmed, but it did no good. I was caught.

The Italian came up all out of breath and he was shouting something in his native tongue that nobody could understand. Italians who run fruit stands are apt to be that way. After a minute the cop quieted him down and got the story.

Then he shook me and asked what I had done with the apple. I was scared to death, I guess, but not so scared that I would give that Italian his apple. I said I had dropped it when he started chasing me and the cop shook me pretty hard and told me never to steal anything again and finally let me go. From that I knew that cops are not as smart as kids think they are.

I went around the corner and ate the apple and then I waited until the Italian came back toward his store. When he was almost there I threw the core at him and took him right on the eye. That squared everything. I still get a lot of satisfaction out of that recollection.

The street we lived on was cobblestoned and the side-walks were old, and tipped in places when you stepped on the square stones. For that matter,

everything on the street was old, even the big gas house that was half a block away from our house down toward the river.

During the day we never could play a whole lot, because the docks were busy and the street was filled with big trucks that hauled stuff away from the river. The drivers never paid any attention to us kids, and if we got in the way we got run over. I knew a kid that was trampled on by horses that way, and after I saw what he got I kept out of the street.

There was a little while after five o'clock each day when we could play ball and kick the wicket, but just as soon as the sun went down back of the gas house, we used to be afraid to play. Right across from the tenement I lived in was Old Man Martin. I guess he was a tough old egg.

He used to come home drunk and once he kicked me in the stomach. That was because he said I hollered too much. After that I kept away from him. But he was not the only one. Most of the men on the street worked on the docks and they used to be in the saloon on the corner from quitting time until about six, when they went home to dinner. They were all right going into the saloon, but sometimes they were pretty hard on kids when they came out.

It was a funny thing about the old gas house. The sun always sank behind it and it cast a big

round shadow over the street and up the face of the tenements. It was almost like a curtain.

We used to watch it, and now that I have grown up and can understand such things better, it seems to me that I used to think of the shadow as a hand that was groping up the face of the buildings and making everything dark for the fellows that came out at night.

Inside the tenements there were women who used to sit by the windows and wait. My mother was like that. She used to wait for my father, and the longer she waited the more worried she got. My father worked on the docks and he was a strange man. Lots of people used to laugh at me because I was Jim Murphy's kid. Of course, I am not naming real names—not with my reputation!

That was in the old days, though, before my father got elected a district committeeman. After he got that job he did not work on the docks and we lived better. Nobody laughed at me then, because he had a big pull and I used to be safe from the cops.

But I am ahead of the story again. I told you about the apple, because that was the first thing I ever stole. There were plenty more things to come that were not just apples. After my father got his political job the cops were afraid to bother me much and that made it easy to steal.

My father was too busy drinking and talking big

with men who still worked on the docks to bother much about me. Even when he was on the docks making only two dollars a day, he used to lend money that he needed to feed us and he used to drink all the time.

He was known as a fighter. I saw him fight a man once right outside the saloon, and even after he was knocked flat on his back he got up and sailed in and licked the man. I was proud of that. He used to wheel a truck on the docks and his hands were the biggest I ever saw, and the hardest. He used to lick me pretty often before I had sense enough to run and I knew just how strong and hard he was.

The second thing I ever stole was an apple too. I guess I stole a hundred of them, and all from the same Italian. I used to eat them and then throw the cores into his store, just to make him madder than ever. Pretty soon the other kids got as much nerve as I had and I guess we swiped a barrel of that poor sap's apples.

My father always said I did not need any education, so when I was fourteen I quit school and went to work on the docks. I was a checking boy. I carried a board with a list on it, and when the foreman called out how many cases of certain things they loaded onto a truck, I marked the number down on the paper. I felt pretty big, but I made only six dollars a week.

My father tried to get me a heavier job, but they said I was not strong enough to push one of the trucks, and I was glad they said that. Even for twelve dollars a week, I knew I never would be a laborer. They were just like the horses hitched to the bigger trucks that scared the kids down the street.

But I did not say anything about that. I knew how big and how hard my father's hands were. I just kept it to myself and schemed what I would do when I was big enough to get twelve dollars every Saturday night.

Out of the six dollars I earned, I had to give my mother five. That was because we were very poor, my father said, and boys should help at home. But he went right on drinking at the saloon, and I used to hear men talk about how drunk he got and what a good spender he was.

A dollar a week was not very much. I used to smoke about two packs of cigarettes a day and that took most of the dollar. But it was all right, I guess, until I met little Mary Dix. You know how kids are. I sure loved Mary. She used to wear a little red dress and a brown hat and she used to tell me how she mended all her own clothes and stockings and hats. I loved her. I guess she liked me too.

The movies were just beginning to come out then, and I used to take her down to the show. It was four blocks from where we lived and we used to walk down and back. It cost ten cents each to get

in. I needed more than a dollar a week and when I asked my father for another dollar he almost hit me. Said I had to keep away from Mary too. I knew I never would do that. I knew my father was not as good as I was.

Right about then, when I was fifteen, the foreman came to me one day and showed me how to make more than a dollar extra each week. He said all I had to do when we were loading cases was to put down two more than what he called out each time and he would give me ten dollars a week. So I did that.

I knew we were stealing, all right, but it was no worse than the apples, so long as the cops did not come around. After that I took Mary lots of places and even bought a suit for myself, and when my old man asked about it, I told him it was my money that bought it, and he winked and laughed and nothing more was ever said about it.

Right after that my father was elected committeeman. That changed everything. Instead of ten extra each week, I got twenty, and there was no more talk about me being a laborer. The foreman seemed more friendly to me after election. The old man quit his job on the docks and used to spend a lot of time in the saloon and tell men how big he was and how well he knew the governor and the mayor.

Everybody seemed to like him then. He got to

be the best-known man in the district and he spent money faster than ever. I heard him tell my mother once that he always knew what he was doing when he spent money and that he had proved it by getting this new job with no work and plenty of pay.

We moved out of the tenement a year after the old man was elected the first time. We took a single house two blocks away and there was a yard behind it where a little grass grew. My mother used to be out there most of the time when she was not cooking or washing. But after we got the servant in the house she was out there even more. Men and women used to come to the house and ask the old man to help them out of trouble. They called him a politician and he never failed them. He was good that way; but for his drinking, folks used to think he was a fine man. But I guess I could have told them a few things!

After he quit the docks his hands got softer and whiter and he was not as strong as he used to be, though he was still a bad fighter and stronger than most men. He was a battering man. Whatever he did, he did with all the strength he had.

He used to work mighty hard election days. I remember the first time I ever saw his picture in the paper. He had his best suit on, and a white collar, and somebody wrote under the picture that he was a self-made man and boss of the gas house district. They said there was a lesson to be learned

from his square chin. Knowing what I do now, I still laugh at that. He was self-made, all right!

Anyway, we lived better after he got himself into politics. One night the captain of the police station came to our house. He had locked my old man up in the old days, but he came to our house now and was mighty nice and friendly. I hid in the hall and heard what they said and the old man sure told him where to get off.

"You'll split with me, un'erstand?" the old man growled. "You been skimmin' the milk too long around here. If you don't like it, you'll get a chance to go to the sticks on night duty!"

I guess I was a pretty smart kid in some ways. I knew what my father meant. I knew that Moriarity and Clancy kept their saloons open Sundays and that they ran big crap games and card games upstairs. I knew that was against the law too. But laws are no good if the cops are fixed. Now that the old man was a politician, he could fix the cops.

That gave me confidence, because I knew the cops would be afraid to arrest me. I would get the old man after them, and he would go after them too—not for me, but on account of my mother. Even the captain himself was scared of the old man, because he promised to come to the house every Thursday night and pay money he had collected for protection.

When I saw how everybody was grafting I began

to open my eyes. It was a cinch that my foreman on the docks was in cahoots with the truck drivers that hauled those cases, and they must be in cahoots with the men that checked in the loads at the other end. So I decided to find out what was up and get more money for myself. That was what my father had done; anybody could see that.

I had a little pal named Danny Critch, and I told Danny we could make some money together. He was willing, so we fixed it up for Danny to follow one of the trucks and see what became of the stuff they carried and how it was checked in at the place they delivered it. Danny found out. It was checked in just the same as I wrote it on my paper. I guess there was a crooked receiving clerk.

What Danny discovered meant that we had to go farther than just following the truck, but Danny was all excited about the crooked work and was willing to keep trying.

He even got into the building where the stuff was stored and found out that it was only a warehouse where lots of merchants kept their stuff till they were ready to use it. I am older now and can realize what suckers big merchants are apt to be.

Just as soon as ten cases came in, it was put down on the books as twelve, and nobody knew the difference until an inventory came, and then it was too late to trace the missing cases. But it was not too late for Danny and me. We knew that they stayed

right on the docks when the trucks left and it was up to us to find out what happened to them after that.

We sneaked out of the house for three successive nights before we learned anything, and then we learned a lot. We saw a big truck go to the docks and load the extra cases aboard. Danny and me hooked on behind and rode across town a ways to another old warehouse. Then we hid and saw the cases unloaded and taken inside.

It was all done in the dark and we had to keep back for fear of being caught, but we heard the cases being ripped open inside the warehouse and after a while the dock foreman himself came out and walked away. He had been in the truck all the time and we never knew it.

Danny said he had been there to sell the extra cases and get his money, and that he had the money on him. Danny was seventeen and I was just going on sixteen, but we were both pretty game.

"He stole the money," Danny whispered to me; "why shouldn't we steal it from him? I'll bet there's a hunnerd bucks on him!"

In those days a hundred dollars was a fortune to me. Afterward Danny and me had as much as twenty thousand dollars at a time, but that was later, when we got the gang organized.

I was a little scared at first, but Danny told me there was nobody around and we could do it so

that the foreman never would know who pulled the job. Just as though he was going to prove we could, he picked up a cobblestone and we sneaked up close behind the foreman. Danny heaved the stone and it took the man on the back of the neck.

He went down like a sawed tree, and I admit I was scared stiff, but I would not let Danny see it, so we ran up and went through his pockets. That was how we got started on big money. We found a roll of bills and I stuffed it into my coat.

"He'll be all right," Danny whispered as we left the foreman on the sidewalk. "He'll come right out of that and get up and go home."

There was not any trouble about getting away. Nobody was around and Danny and me just walked fast around a few dark corners and finally went into our backyard through an alley that ran behind it.

Right at the corner there was a street light and we stopped there, in the shadows, and counted the money. What a surprise! The foreman had carried more than $2000 in bills! So much money scared us. Where could we hide it all? But we were both pretty game, I guess, even if we were kids, so we each took half and said we were pards and never would tell a soul, even if we got arrested.

"But we won't git pinched," Danny whispered; "not with your old man being a politician. I should say not! Maybe we better go around and give the cops a little dough just to stand in right."

But I said no. Nobody would ever know we did it, I said, and that was the best way. I never trusted cops. I do not now.

Then Danny sneaked home and so did I, but I did not sleep that night. I was too excited thinking about all the money we had and what I could do for Mary with that much money. But, after all, I was getting afraid to spend it. People might get suspicious over it and think I did that to the foreman. I had to be mighty careful, I could see that.

It must have been three o'clock in the morning when I heard the door of my father's room open. He came into the hall and started down the back stairs. Then I heard a soft knocking at the back door, and you can bet I was scared. I thought sure I was caught, and jumped out of bed and began dressing so that I could run.

I had more than a thousand dollars in my clothes and knew I could go a long ways off on that. I wished I could reach Danny first. By the time I had slid into my clothes I heard the old man coming back upstairs, so I sneaked into the hall and hid in a corner.

He would go right to my room and drag me out to face the foreman, I thought, and while he was at the door I was going to sneak past him and down the front stairs to the street.

But he never stopped at my door at all. He went to my mother's and stood there listening for quite a

long while. I guess he wanted to be sure she was asleep.

I hardly breathed as I crouched there in the dark hall. I could just see my father. He had put on an overcoat downstairs and the bottom of his night-gown showed under it. I could see his bare ankles too. After a while he went downstairs.

Then I knew it had nothing to do with the foreman, and after that police captain had come I was always interested in learning more about my old man, so I crept down the stairs after him. He went into the dining room and left the door open just a little, so that he could hear anything outside in the hall. I got close to the door and listened. Somebody was there, because the old man was talking harsh to him. Mostly the old man did talk harsh to people that came nights.

"You can't pull that racket on me," I heard him say. "I'll give you a tossing you'll never forget."

Then he began to swear, and I pitied the poor guy in the room with him. But you can imagine the scare I got when the fellow answered and I heard his voice. It was the foreman! The same guy me and Danny had dropped and robbed. I was just going to run when he started talking. I waited and listened.

"I tell you they did, boss!" he said, his voice kind of whiney. "I never knew a thing was comin'. You gotta believe me. I've always played square,

ain't I? How many times have I delivered the goods right like I said I was goin' to? I was on my way here when they rolled me, boss; honest I was!

"I collected about twenty-one hunnerd for the stuff. I had it in my pocket and I hadn't got over two hunnerd yards from the warehouse when they dropped me from behind. The guys from the warehouse found me and got me straightened around. We didn't say nothin', of course—here, look at my neck! Ain't that proof? They got me with a cobblestone!"

The old man snorted and swore some more, but I could have laughed right out loud. The foreman never even suspected me and Danny. We had it all our own way—and my own old man was in on the deal for the stolen cases! Wasn't he a smart old guy? I thought. But he would find out that his son was no fool!

He was in with the politicians and the police and the crooks too! I could see that. He made a lot of money. He would have to. Two thousand dollars in a night just from one man. And he thought I was working for six dollars a week!

I sneaked back upstairs thinking about how my mother worked and how she dressed, and how I worked and how the old man was rolling in money. I hated him for that. I could hardly wait for morning to tell Danny all I knew.

II

IT is very easy to remember that next morning—the one following the night when I learned that my father was sharing in the profits on the stolen cases. It had seemed to me, as I lay awake that night, that the old man was in on everything. The police, and now the crooks.

I wondered if he knew that I was marking the things down wrong for the foreman. Perhaps he even had me hired down there at the docks to do that very thing. In any event, he was pretty smart. A fellow was certainly safe as long as he had the police under his thumb. When he committed a crime, who was there to arrest him?

Danny met me on the corner about seven o'clock while I was on my way to work. He wanted me to quit the job and just try to find easy ways of making money, but I figured I was too smart for that. If I did not go to work that day the foreman might think there was something wrong about it. So I went.

I had to laugh at the crooked foreman. His face was a sight and the back of his neck was all swollen. I guess he scraped his face when he fell, after

Danny hit him with that cobblestone. No wonder.

All the men were winking behind his back, because some of them did not like him very well and thought he had got into a fight. But they were afraid of him, because he could fire them if he liked. It seemed to me that everybody—even the laborer—was trying to hide things from other people. Already I guessed there was some boss that was even bigger than my old man.

It made me laugh to think how I had it over them all. Danny and me knew just what had happened. We were the only ones that did. One of the other foremen asked our boss what had happened, and I heard him say he fell downstairs while he was walking round at night. That was a hot one!

At noontime I saw Danny again and he had more ideas. He said I was crazy to work. He told me if I listened at the old man's door I would learn all kinds of ways to make easy money, and if we ever got caught, all I had to tell the captain was what I had heard between him and the old man.

So that night I told the foreman I was sick of the job and was going to work somewhere else. I nearly laughed in his face when he told me never to say anything about the missing cases, and gave me an extra twenty dollars to seal the bargain. But he asked where I was going to work and I had to say something, so I said I was going to work for Clancy, who ran the saloon.

The foreman seemed surprised, and I knew he would tell my father, so I went to Clancy and thought I would see how much pull my old man really had. Clancy ran a pool room on the horse races upstairs over his saloon and I was sure he was one of the men paying the captain money for protection.

I told him he had to hire me, and he grumbled a little, but he gave me a job marking up the names of race horses on a blackboard. Then I told him he had to tell the old man that he asked me to come there to work. I was getting smart then, and I said: "That won't hurt you any with the old man, Clancy"; and it worked, because he winked and said I was a smart kid.

I never really worked there. There was another kid to whom Clancy paid eight dollars a week, and he did all the marking and errands. I just hung around. Clancy never paid me any money, but I did not want any, because I had nearly twelve hundred dollars hidden away behind the cupboard in my room and I was using that.

About that time I noticed that all the kids in the neighborhood wanted to stick around me and Danny. They knew they were pretty safe as long as they were with me. No matter what we did, the cops never bothered us much. They pretended to chase us, but they never really tried to catch us.

I found out a lot about men during the next year.

Mostly they are afraid of their jobs. The cops on our beat had a soft thing as long as they caused no trouble, and they made a pretty good thing out of Clancy and Moriarity.

There was a house down the street that the kids used to whisper about. It had red shades on the windows and men used to go there a lot at night. Lots of times we used to wait there and pick up young fellows that were not smart and had drunk too much. We would walk them down toward the gas house and then Danny would hit them on the chin and we would take their money. Sometimes we did not get much, but other times luck was better.

There was a woman that ran the house, and once she stopped me on the street and asked me if I wanted to make five dollars. I said yes and she sent me three blocks away to a little store. She gave me a note and I handed it to the man running the store. He told me to wait. After a long time he came back and handed me a little package.

I slipped the package into my pocket and started to take it back to the woman. On the way a stranger stopped me and began to talk. Right away I knew he was strange cop. I never knew just how I spotted them, but I did. I could always tell. I acted like a dumb kid, but all the time I knew that he was after the package, and I schemed out a way to get away from him. It was easy to see that if the cops wanted the package, the woman would pay a lot

more than five dollars for it. Finally I waited my chance, then I ran.

The stranger chased me, but I led him through an alley and climbed over a fence. That way I lost him. After that I went to the house with the red shades, because I did not want to go where the woman was waiting for me. I was afraid they would be watching her too. Looking back, I have to smile at some of my kid tricks. I guess I could just smell easy money ever since I was born.

She was at the house and she was glad to see me. Right away she wanted the package. "Have you got it, sonny?" she asked, her voice kind of shaking.

"Sure, I got it," I said; "but not with me. A fellow stopped me and took it away from me. He told me to tell you that he would give it back if I brought him some real money."

The woman swore—lots of women on our street did that—and finally she asked, to herself, "How many people have I got to be paying?" I never said a thing, but she went out of the room and after a while came back with an envelope. It was sealed up.

"Take that to him and bring the package," she growled, swearing again. I went out.

Down the street a ways I opened the envelope. There was fifty dollars in it. Five ten-dollar bills. I put them in my pocket and went back to the house. She met me and I told her I would give her the pack-

age after I got the five dollars she promised me. She gave me the money, but she swore some more and said I did not deserve the money, on account of being caught.

It was quite a while later that she learned who I was, and then she only laughed and said I was "Jim Murphy's kid, awright!" Danny laughed himself sick over the way I had worked it, and we found out afterward that the strange cop who had stopped me was a Federal dick and chasing up drugs for the Government.

That made us both sore. The package contained drugs and we could have had twice fifty dollars for it. But we had been half smart, I guess, and fooled the wise woman anyway. The fellows we had been robbing outside the house were hop-heads and they made easy takings. But most of them lost their money before they ever got out of the house.

It was easy, in ways like that, to learn what other people's grafts were. I knew my father was wise to what was going on in the different places, and I was pretty sure that if I ever really got caught he would have to fix it, on account of my mother. That gave me confidence and when I remembered how the men on the docks worked I always decided more and more I never would be fool enough to do that; I never would be a laborer.

Thus far I have tried to tell things exactly as I remember them in a kid sort of way. But it was not

long before I began to see the kind of a fellow a man was just by looking at him. Most of the fellows along the street talked big and did little.

When you see a fellow with close-set eyes and a long nose, or one with a chin that sticks way out, you can bet he is a crook. But most of the time he is yellow.

Danny and me were going along making good money when I learned that lesson. We met a fellow named Fletch, and he started to tell me about the easy money we could make robbing the fruit store on the corner. We decided to do it the next Saturday night. I never liked that Italian anyway—not since he got me caught with the apple that first time.

Most of the people on the street paid the Italian their bills on Saturday, and so he always had the most money on hand then. So the three of us went there to rob the place about three o'clock in the morning. We got in through the back window and it was dead easy. But we had to be quiet, because the Italian lived over the store and might be listening.

We went all through the store and did not find the money, and we were about to quit, when the Italian came down the stairs carrying a candle. It was easy for Danny to hit him, so he did. Of course, the candle went out, and we all got on top of the Italian before he knew what was up.

Fletch pulled a gun, and that was the first time I

ever knew he had it. He stuck it in the storekeeper's face and threatened to kill him if he did not tell us where the money was. The wop told. We got about three hundred dollars and then beat it right out the front door, after Fletch had soaked the Italian again so we could get away.

The next morning the papers told about it, but there was no clew that tied us in on the job. I must admit I felt pretty big after that. It proved me and Danny were men, anyway. But I did not like the idea of that gun. Always, in the back of my mind, there was a feeling that that was the sort of thing nobody could fix, not even the old man or his bigger boss. And I was afraid of the law when it got a chance to work.

Too many smart fellows from the street had been picked up and sent away. I guess it made a fellow go easy. Any man has a right to anything he is smart enough to get is the way I always felt in those days, but anyone can go too far, you bet.

There are some things nobody can fix, and guns is one of them. I hate guns. Of course, after the gang got going good, I had to carry one, but I always hated using it. The only times I did, it seemed like every shot burned right into my hand, and I hoped people I was shooting at would get scared and beat it, because I did not want to hit them.

But I felt big after that store job and so did Danny. We got one hundred dollars each and told

Fletch to get rid of that rod and shut up. But he did not. That is why I know about men with close-set eyes and chins that stick way out. They are yellow.

Naturally the cops had to make a showing after the robbery, and they happened to pick up Fletch, because he had done time—he had a record. When they took him in, Fletch talked; they turned him over to the captain, and because he was yellow he talked.

That night when I got home the old man was waiting for me, and he was white and worried looking. He asked me what I knew about the robbery and I told him nothing at all. He put on his hat and we walked over to see the captain. They asked me a lot of questions, and I was scared, you bet, but I never cracked a thing. Just said I knew nothing about the job.

All the time I was wondering how they suspected me, and it was not long before I learned. They brought Fletch in and he stood right up and told the whole thing.

"You can't put the collar on me!" he laughed. "Not with Murphy's kid in on the job with me! I ain't no sucker born the day before yes'tiddy! Do what you please. But make a pinch with me and I'll crack the works on the kid, here. I know a few things about Moriarity and Clancy too!"

He looked right at the old man and winked. Anybody could see that he felt pretty safe. I never said a thing, and when they brought Danny in, he never said a thing either.

We were there almost all night and finally the old man took me home. I thought he was going to beat me up, but he never said a word. His face was white and his forehead was all wrinkles, like he was thinking very deep. When we got home I lit a cigarette and sat down to take whatever was coming. Nothing came. The old man waved me off to bed without a word. I never slept much that night and the next morning I ducked out without breakfast. I thought I ought to meet Danny and we would both take some money and go away for a week or so.

But Danny wanted to beat up Fletch. He said the captain had to let the rat go, and now that he was free he would hold it over my father's head that we were in on the store job. Danny was mad. I told him that we could do nothing like that without bringing about a lot of talk and suspicion.

We went to a little restaurant for some coffee, and while we were there one of the detectives from the station came in and sat down with us. We did not like that, but pretended not to mind.

"The captain says he wants to see you, kid," he said to me. "I guess you two better go down to-

gether. Don't get me wrong; it ain't a collar. He just wants to tip you off to a couple of things. I'd get right down there if I was you."

At first I figured we ought to beat it, but there was no sense in that, so Danny and me went down. The captain took us in his private room and told us we better lay low and do nothing at all for two weeks. He said the Fletch matter was a serious one and might cause a whole lot of trouble for us, but if we would stand pat and keep quiet for two weeks he thought he could handle it all right.

We finally promised and shook hands with him. I never let on what I knew about him and the old man dividing up the collections. I would save that, I figured, until I needed it as a last shot.

Danny and me left the station house and walked down the street. We were feeling pretty big, having shaken hands with the captain and heard him admit he was protecting us. Of course, it was on account of the old man, but even at that I had a thing or two on the captain that he did not know about. We wondered how he was going to keep Fletch quiet.

When we got down to Clancy's place we went in. Clancy came along the bar and caught my coat by the lapels. He pulled me close; whispered something. At first I thought I was wrong in what I heard, but when I asked him to repeat it, he did:

A William Fox Production. *Me-Gangster.*

THE WILLIAMS FAMILY GATHERS AT THE DOORSTEP OF THEIR HOME FOR AN EVENING'S RECREATION.

"They got Fletch last night. Bumped him off down near the gas house about four o'clock this morning. He had just got out of the can. The inside story is that he's a stool pigeon."

I pretty near fell down when I understood. They had killed Fletch because they were afraid he was going to talk. I knew that. Even the captain was in on the scheme. Maybe he had given somebody protection just for doing the job.

All I could think of was the old man's white face, with the wrinkles on his forehead, and the quiet way he took me home. After all, Fletch would have had something on my father, too, because the captain would have talked to free himself.

My old man was quite a hard guy, I could see that. He was a fighter and he did not know how or when to quit. But I knew I had better watch all guys with close-set eyes and chins that stick out in front of their faces. And I was mighty thankful my old man was a politician.

Danny Critch was a great help in a fight, because he was dead game and used to like to fight. But he never was very smart at figuring things out in advance. I mean by that, he might fight too quick and take things into his own hands when that was foolish.

But he got a queer angle on the killing of Fletch. He was afraid that maybe Fletch had got time to

talk to some of his close friends before he was bumped off. If that was the case, as anyone could see, there might be people left that knew too much.

I never went near Fletch's body and I never talked about his being killed. I figured the best thing to do was just not to pay any attention to the thing. But Danny was different. He wanted to go over into Fletch's neighborhood and see what he could find out. I figured that was foolish, but he thought we better know, because some of Fletch's pals might bump us off if he had got a chance to talk to them.

It was right about that time that I noticed I was getting like older fellows along our street; like the fellows that I used to see at night when I was more of a kid. I was always looking over my shoulder and I never felt right among strangers. I always wanted to know just exactly who was around me. That feeling came over me more and more as Danny talked about Fletch's pals.

Even if Fletch had only mentioned the fact that he had something on me, that would be enough to make his pals think I might have bumped him off. They might go to the police and tell what they knew, and then what? I might be arrested for a crime that my own father did!

I told Danny to wait till I could talk with my old man. I went right to him and asked if he had heard about Fletch. He said no. Then I told him

that Fletch had been killed and I was afraid they might blame me, because I was suspected of being in on that store job with him.

"If they let him go and he got a chance to talk to his pals before he was killed," I said, "they might blame me."

"The captain's got too much sense for that!" the old man snapped, sudden-like. "He'd never give that rat a chance to squawk!"

I never said a word, but I knew from what he said that the old man had fixed it with the captain to have Fletch killed. The detective that had taken me to the captain said something later on that proved I was right. He was talking about the crime and he said that Fletch had been found down near the gas house. He was all crumpled up against the wall of a vacant warehouse and he was shot through the head.

"He was in a fight—a gun fight," the detective told us, "with some crook pals of his. We found his gun beside him with one shot fired, and we hold at the station house another gun we took off him when he was first pinched. He was a gunman. When a guy like him gets the bump nobody cares. It'll all die out in a day or two."

But he did not fool me—not after my old man said the captain would not be fool enough to give Fletch a chance to talk to friends. I knew they had

marched Fletch from the station to the gas house and bumped him off. If they had not, where did the second gun come from? That was a laugh. It was a police frame-up.

The cops had killed Fletch and planted another gun on him after he was dead. Not only that, they had planted some stolen jewelry on him, too, and said that he was killed in a fight over dividing up loot with somebody. Nobody cared much about Fletch, so the matter died out, except for some talk in the papers and a half-baked investigation by the district attorney's office.

After that I just laughed at everything, until Danny was shot at over on another street. Then I knew it went back to Fletch and we better not laugh. They almost got Danny and he had to be mighty careful, but he would not leave town. Danny was like my old man in that fighting way. Once get him started and he would fight an army.

The captain called us into the station again and talked with us and tried to find out about who shot at Danny. He told us he was our friend and that he had proved it and that we ought to talk to him. I guess we would have talked if we could, but we did not know anything to talk about.

He did not believe us. "You'll go over there and take a shot at somebody and then we'll have the papers shouting about a gang war and the district attorney stirring up the Fletch case again," he said.

"It will be better to let me handle it. Tell me all you know and I'll keep you safe, and quiet up a bad mess as well."

Danny swore he did not know who shot at him. The captain was doubtful and worried. He asked us to promise not to start anything, and I did, but Danny said he would shoot the first guy that looked at him crooked.

"You got a rod on you?" the captain asked.

"I certainly has," Danny admitted; "and I'll bust hell out of any guy that crosses me sudden."

"You give me the gun," the captain said. "I can run you in just for having it."

"And you'll run me out mighty quick after that," Danny grins. "You and me are buddies, all right, but no bluff goes. You got a rod in your kick all the time. Would you go without it?"

That was pretty raw talk to a captain, but I could see Danny knew what he was doing. The captain just licked his lips a lot and drummed on the table with his fingers. At last he asked us to promise not to do anything until he could find out what the lay of the land was. We promised that. We said we would not go over into the other district for a week.

The very next day the detective met us on the street and winked at us and said that things would work out all right. This detective was the captain's right-hand man. He never said a thing more, but

the following day we heard that a fellow over in the other district had been arrested for a job he had done more than a year before. He was tried quick and got seven to ten years in the can.

It was a week before the dick told us that he never committed the crime of which he stood convicted, but was a friend of Fletch's and was probably the guy who had bumped Fletch off. We knew that was a lie, but it was a good way of telling us that the captain had framed the fellow to avoid trouble for us. He was probably the one who had shot at Danny, and the captain had reached him through stool pigeons.

That was two big things my old man had ribbed up, and Danny and me could see he was sure in right with the big bosses. Other people could see it too. The captain and the detective and the smart kids that knew there was more to Fletch's death than came out in the news, all were convinced that my old man was in right. There began to be talk about his running for alderman.

Before long there were fellows coming to me from all over our part of town. They all wanted to play the game with me. It was then that Danny got the idea of making up a gang, so that we could tell them all what to do and then make them split with us for protection. I was still pretty young, but I was dead game and felt safe enough with the old man riding around in carriages and talking about buying

an automobile. Every saloon where we went the drinks were set up free, because we were who we were.

Danny always carried a gun, so I finally started lugging one. I wanted everybody to know that we could not be double-crossed, and lots of times we let on that we really had a gang and knew all the tricks that were pulled by guys from that part of town. On account of the old man being a politician the bluff worked.

But at first it worked in a bad way. Some fellows from down near the lower end of the district pulled off a holdup on a gambling house uptown. There really was a gang uptown and they came down after us. I was supposed to be the downtown leader, but I never knew a thing about the holdup.

Danny and me were standing on the corner outside Clancy's one night when seven fellows dropped off a trolley car and came toward us. We watched them, and it was a good thing that we did. At that time of night strangers were not seen around there much, and those that came were watched mighty close.

These fellows acted queer. They sort of spread out around us and closed in. Danny got suspicious first. A fellow does get that way after a while. When you are always thinking of all the things that might happen to you, it seems that everything that happens is one of them.

Danny went for his rod and the other gang saw him. Right away guns were out and bullets flying. It was my first time in a gun fight and I was scared blue. But I yanked the gat and fired back, not taking time to aim at all.

Danny grabbed my arm and we jumped back into Clancy's place and raced out through the back way. From there we started down the alley back of my house, but the uptown gang was sore and ready for trouble. They had come there to bump me off, because they thought I had engineered the robbery up in their district, and they were hopped up too. They trailed through the alley after us, shooting as they came.

If you never heard the way a bullet sounds when it whoops past you, I am not the one to describe it. It just kind of hisses, and all the time you are afraid you will trip while you are running. One of the bullets clipped against the brick wall of a tenement and then tumbled as it flew on. That is the worst noise I ever heard. Maybe that is because you hear it at such a time. It just shrieks at you.

Danny and me ran as fast as we could and both of us emptied our guns back at the gang. But we did not aim. Nobody got hit all night, though there must have been fifty shots fired. We got to the back fence where Danny and me had split up the takings on that foreman robbery and from there on we were pretty safe, but scared, you bet. We got over the

fence and down into our yard, and then went into the house through the old cellar door. We heard the gang in the alley, and even after we had disappeared they fired a few shots just to let us know how tough they were.

The papers were full of the thing next day, but there never was a mention of Danny or me. Nobody seemed to know we was in on the fracas, but we knew a lot of men did—all the men in Clancy's at the time we chased through there knew us. They never caught any of the gang that came after us, but word of the thing reached my old man and he called me in the next night and told me he was convinced I was going to the bad and had made up his mind to send me away to a school where I could learn right from wrong.

I told him I would not go, and we had hot words. He asked if I carried a rod, and I told him yes and had it on me and that if he wanted to be sure about it he might just try beating me again.

Anything might have happened, because we both lost our heads and swore a lot at each other, and I let him know how much I knew about him, though I never cracked about Fletch or the foreman, only about the captain. He got fighting mad. He jumped up and started after me and I ran around a table and reached for my gun. I was only going to scare him with it, but he grabbed a heavy glass thing from the table and threw it at me. It went right

over my head and I laughed and started for the door—then I stopped.

My father kind of cried like he was hurt, and forgot all about me and ran toward the door. Then I saw, too, and I saw my father fall on his knees and heard him say, "I never meant it! God Almighty, I never meant it!"

My mother was on the floor and her head was bleeding where the heavy glass thing had hit her. I forgot everything then. I went right down beside my father and we both cried. That was a funny thing. It was the first time I ever saw my father cry and all of a sudden I knew how much I loved my mother.

"If she's hurt bad, I'll kill you," I told him, and he went right on crying, and after a few seconds he shook his head and said, "If she is, kid, I'll kill myself!"

Then I knew we both felt the same, and we lifted my mother up and laid her on a couch and I got water and we bathed her face and she came to. She never complained a bit. There was a bad bruise on her forehead and the old man kept bathing that and telling her he never meant to do it.

"I'd rather have you mean that, Jim," she said in weak tones, "than talk about sending my boy away."

"I won't send him," the old man said through his tears.

"Is it true—about the captain, Jim?" she asked him then. He did not answer and she looked at me. I never cracked a thing either. I knew she had been listening outside the door, and heard what I told the old man. After a long time she sat up and rubbed her hurt with her red hand and said, "I guess it is true. I'll be going to bed."

The old man tried to help her, but she pushed him aside and went out into the hall. He dropped into a chair and put his face in his hands. I went to the buffet and got a stiff drink. Then I set the bottle near him, just to show it was all jake with me. He did not take a drink. It was the first time I ever saw him refuse.

I went out to find Danny, because I felt shaky. When I met him he said we would have to get a good gang and go uptown and really pull off a job that would make them see we were not the kind that you can fool with. The uptown people were supposed to be swells and it made Danny sore to have them run a gun fight on us.

All I could think of was my mother and that bruise on her head and the way the old man sat so still and refused to drink. I felt queer way down deep inside and I had the courage of a lion, or of fellows like Coky Nott, the hop-head, who was weak as a cat when himself, but game enough to get a cop's gun away and kill him after he had been in the house with the red curtains on the windows.

Coky had gone to the chair, but I was no hop-head, and, anyway, a man that kills a cop is crazy and ought to get the limit. I just told Danny we would get the gang together next day and do our stuff. After all, we could not let those bums come down there and shoot us up, without any comeback. That was the way the gang started, and the next thing I will tell is what happened after it got started and we went uptown to show those gunmen just where we stood.

III

WE did not have any trouble getting all the fellows we wanted for the gang. Danny took care of most of that, but we gave a lot of thought to who we could trust, and we were mighty sure that we did not get men with chins that stuck out or eyes that were too close together. Fletch had taught us that lesson.

We did our best, but, of course, we could not be too particular. All the fellows in the lower part of town were anxious to come in with us. We worked on the quiet, but somehow they found out that we were forming a gang. They always seemed to find out everything.

Danny did all the talking, because I was going to be the leader of the gang on account of my old man being a politician. All the fellows we talked to knew that they would be pretty safe if they played with me, and they all felt pretty sure that we would try some kind of a comeback at the gang from uptown.

That is the big trouble with gangsters; they do foolish things just to make people think they are

game. They have very little real brains. I often laugh at what the papers say about master crooks and the great minds of the underworld. Take it from me, they are all stupid, and most of them are suckers. But that will come along a little later when I tell you how smart we were and yet how foolish and how dumb.

As I say, just as soon as the uptown gang started that shooting, all the crooks in our district figured I would come back at them so that I would not look yellow. I fell for that, too, though Danny wanted to do it even more than me. So Danny talked with the guys we wanted, or thought we wanted, and pretty soon we had six fellows we were sure we could trust. It was not only trusting them that counted; we had to trust their nerve too. Nobody can ever tell what will happen in a gun fight like we were planning.

You bet that uptown gang was keeping its eyes open for us. They were pretty sure we would show up in their district and show them what "tough" really meant, and they were going to be ready for us. One night you might catch them when they were willing to beat it without too stiff a fight. The very next night they might fight like soldiers because they were full of hop.

I found out later that ninety per cent of the gun shooters are dope fiends and they do their shooting

when they are all hopped up with dope. That stuff gives them false courage and false strength, just like it did Coky Nott when he killed that cop. We had to watch that.

When we had our six fellows all picked out, I asked Danny what he really knew about them, and it was little enough. They were all game, as far as that goes, and they were ready for anything as long as we led the way; but I wanted to know about their records. I was afraid that maybe some of them were wanted for killing somebody, and if they got collared later they might make me talk to the police or to the old man and save them from being convicted. I did not want to protect them for something they did before they played with me, and I knew I would have to if they really got anything on me.

Danny said he would find out. I never knew for six months where he went to find out, but after that time, when my old man had to protect the detective that was our friend for grafting, I learned that Danny went to him and wanted to know if any of the six we had picked were stool pigeons. Can you beat that? The dick said they were not and he thought they were "regular" and could be trusted. Danny did not tell him why he wanted to know, but just as soon as we pulled the raid he did not have to be told. He knew.

The six men were Dutch Weldt, Nick Capos, Twist Burke, Dandy Farr, Gat Malone and Slug Dolan. Gat and Slug we let in because they were tough and used to fighting. Nick was a wop, and we let him in because we were afraid that the other wops might turn against us if we did not have one of them in on the gang profits as much as we were. Dutch and Twist were dead game and cunning. With Danny and me to lead, I figured we were pretty strong for anybody.

I always pitied poor Slug Dolan. When I was a little kid he was a fighter, and I guess he was pretty good. He won a few fights and finally got a chance at the big clubs, but after he had made good he got in a scrape about a woman, and the woman's husband shot at him and broke his right arm with the bullet. After that Slug was no good for fighting and he never had been any good for anything else, so he turned crook.

He was not smart, and he got caught and was sent away. After he did his time, he got caught again and went for seven years. Now he was a stir bug—that is, a guy that has served more than ten years. They call them stir bugs because being in prison is being in stir, and after you have been there ten years or more you are sure to be nutty.

When a guy goes nutty in stir he does not show it much, but it is inside of him. He never believes anybody and all he thinks of is a way to fool people.

He gets that way from trying to fool screws in the can. Screws are keepers. Up in prison a guy meets pretty nearly all stir bugs, and you should hear the ideas they give you.

Now that I know what prison is like, I know what I am talking about. But I will not be a stir bug. As long as Mary Dix is waiting for me, that fixes everything. But being in stir, I'll say, is a bad place to reform! Every time guys hear how much of a stretch I got to do, they know about when I am going to get out, and you should hear the schemes they put up to me on crooked jobs that I can work when I am free. That is the way prisoners get their money, and keepers like money the same as everybody else. A prisoner with money can buy a pretty easy stretch for himself.

About a month ago a stir bug finished his bit and got out. He went right to town and got there about dinner-time in the afternoon. He ate his dinner in a restaurant and before eight o'clock he was pinched again for sticking up an old guy that was supposed to have plenty of dough. For that he got ten years more, and that means life for him. He has got a funny cough—the kind guys do not get over.

I never said a word, but I know the inside story on the whole deal. There is a man not more than ten cells from me that did it all. He did it out of sheer spite. Just before the stir bug was to get out he was a trusty, and he did something this other

guy did not like. So the other guy tipped him off that this old man always carried about five thousand dollars or six thousand dollars on him and would be easy picking.

When a guy is let out with a criminal record, five bucks and a prison suit that everybody recognizes, to say nothing of a haircut that is about as popular as that big chair with the wires on it, he has tough picking to get a new suit and get straightened around for a fresh start. You can lay a bet he never will get a job.

So the poor stir bug thanked this other prisoner and went after the old man. All on the quiet, the guy still in prison tipped a screw and the screw tipped a city dick who was on the job waiting for the stick-up. The dick got a lot of credit and the stir bug got what is the same as life for him. But the guy within ten cells from me got his revenge and so squared it with the trusty for refusing him that little favor. That is what stir bugs are. They are crazy as chipmunks and dangerous as hell. They hate everything in the world, and I guess I do not blame them.

But if I had known what they were when Slug was let into our gang, we would have avoided him. He was a quiet guy and never said what he felt, but I found out afterward that he had made up his mind never to do time again and decided to shoot his way out if he ever got cornered. Him and Gat Malone

always carried rods. That was where Gat got his nickname.

But we took them all into the gang and had them meet us in an upstairs room at Clancy's and talk things all over. We sent Twist uptown to watch the gang we were after and see how they acted and where and when we could locate the same bunch that came after us. It took him a week, but he finally learned that the best chance we had was to drop down on them about two in the morning outside a little saloon that he named. We set the time for the very next night, and when we left Clancy's everybody looked at us very quiet and never said a word. I guess they knew who we were all right, and that they had better keep their mouths shut.

The next night we went uptown separately. Twist knew a place where automobiles were for hire and he went over and got one. He had the driver pick us up at different places, and when we were all aboard he told him to drive us around a while.

When two o'clock in the morning came, we told the guy to drive us to the little saloon. He pulled up and we got out. Everyone of us had a rod in his pocket and, if we had to, we were all ready to start shooting through our coats. I got to admit my heart was jumping worse than it did that night we rolled the dock foreman. But, too, there was something that made me go ahead. I felt pretty big with such a gang behind me, and we had brought

along a quart of whisky and drank it all as we rode in the automobile, so that made us game.

Slug Dolan we left outside to have the driver keep his engine running so we could make a quick get-away. The rest of us just walked in the side door of the saloon and looked around. There were three or four customers at the bar and six men playing poker at a table in the corner. One of the men at the bar I knew right away. He had come down after us. He saw us and hollered something that sounded scared. Danny pulled his rod and let fly. Twist cut loose too. I saw the man at the bar fall down, and a funny look was on his face—just like he had forgot everything he ever knew, and did not care if he had.

The man behind the bar cursed as loud as he could, and you should have seen the men at the table. There were poker chips all over the room. Of course, the saloon was supposed to be closed and the curtains were drawn across the front windows. That helped us a little. For just a couple of minutes, I can tell you, there was a lot of shooting in that place. Then the men were gone except two that lay still on the floor.

Gat Malone went right over the top of the bar and broke open the cash register. Twist took a couple of bottles of whisky and we beat it. We knew the papers would be full of the thing in the

morning and felt pretty sure that gangs would keep out of our district after that.

When we got out to the automobile Slug was having a hard time with the driver. He was standing on the running board and holding his gun square on the driver's head. We all jumped in and Slug made the guy drive us away. It was easy to reach a different part of town. But we just got started in time, because a cop came running toward the saloon right after we got into the car. Slug made him duck into a doorway by shooting at him.

We took the driver across the town from where we were really going and then we drank most of Twist's whisky. We were feeling pretty desperate by that time, and Danny said we ought to get rid of the car right away because maybe it was being hunted by the police. When we got out we planned to separate and meet later at Clancy's.

But I never expected Slug to do what he did. The driver was pretty scared, but he never put up a fight. He looked mighty glad, at last, to see us going. I told him if he knew what was good for him he would keep his mouth shut. He said he would, but Slug slid in close and shot him three times. I almost fainted away, I guess, but it was done before I could stop it.

"You ain't never been in stir," Slug growled when I bawled him out. "I have. I ain't never

goin' back neither! Not if I can shoot my way out! That guy would know us if we ever git jammed up over this, an' I ain't takin' chances!"

You can see for yourself what a stir bug is! They are crazy.

If I had my way, knowing what I know now, I would sentence all men to death if they deserved more than ten years. I mean, after ten years in stir, guys are crazy and should never be let out. If they are not killed, they should get life. Either a ten-year limit or life, because they will be bad actors when they get out if they do a ten stretch. I suppose that sounds funny coming from me, but I really mean it. I know what prisoners talk about and what they plan and what it means to be in stir and see life going by you like a parade of hard knocks and dirty tricks. After a guy gets smart enough to do something that will get him ten years, he is too smart to take much stock in what the police and the courts call justice.

Right in this prison, as I talk to you, there is as much graft going on as I ever pulled off when I was out. Maybe you think us guys in stir ain't wise to it too! I have got a soft job in the library now because I learned a few things when I first came up here.

Always after that I was afraid of Slug Dolan. You never knew just what he might do. All the rest of the gang were a little quiet too. I mean it

is one thing to go gun fighting like we did, but it is another just to kill a poor sap that is working hard for his living.

We separated and went back to Clancy's place. I knew the minute I walked in that Clancy was wise to what had happened, but nobody cracked a thing. I went upstairs and Slug and Twist and Gat were there. Right after me Danny breezed in. Not one of our gang had been hurt a bit. But we all looked pretty white and nobody had much of anything to say. I can remember, now, that all of them looked at Slug kind of funny from time to time, and all of them were a little queer and jumpy. We drank a lot of whisky that night and none of us left Clancy's until it was breakfast time.

Then Nick Capos took all our guns and slipped out the back way and threw them into the river. It was a good thing we thought of that. Later on you will see what a fine mess would have come if we had kept them. Just after Nick came back, the detective from the station house came in. He was scared and nervous and I could see that he had not been sleeping any all night.

"A fine lot of mugs you are!" he snarled at us. "Why didn't you wear signs on your back with all your names on 'em!"

"Did somebody make us?" Gat asks, meaning did somebody know who we were.

"What did you expect?" the dick cracks back.

"Certainly they made you! Who bumped that poor chump that was drivin' the car?"

Right away Slug horned in: "How do we know? What are you gabbin' about anyway?" That was to steer us that Slug did not trust the dick, so nobody answered.

"Yeah," the dick sneered, "I suppose you guys been sittin' right here all night, eh? Talkin', you was. Tellin' parlor stories and havin' a little meetin' between yourselves!"

Twist, as I have said, was very smart. Right away he took up the idea that we had been there all night. "Sure," he said, "we had a poker game. Ask Clancy. We started playin' about ten o'clock and played straight through."

A funny look came over the detective's face and he rubbed his chin with his fingers. "That ain't so bad, at that," he muttered after a while; "not so bad." Then he went to the stairs and called for Clancy.

The saloonkeeper came up, and the dick said, "I ain't been here this mornin', Clancy, see?" Clancy nodded, and the dick went on, "But I will be comin' here in half an hour and I'll be after Danny an' Jimmie Murphy. They got a call out for 'em. But you get plenty of cards and poker chips up here right away and be ready to swear that these kids have been havin' an all-night poker party. Started at ten last night an' still goin' on."

He went downstairs and Clancy got the cards, and we smoked a lot of cigarettes and threw the butts around and in a few minutes we felt we could fool anybody. But I want to tell you that I felt pretty shaky in half an hour when three cops, with the detective, crashed the door and covered us with rods. We pretended to be surprised, and acted like we were just finishing up a game, but I admit I was scared pink.

"We want you, Murphy, and you, too, Danny Critch, fer that shootin' last night. You better come easy an' gentle!" It was the crooked detective talking, and he made it sound good.

I could not speak, but Danny was great. "Sure," he grinned, cool as a cucumber. "What shootin'—crap shootin'?"

"Never mind that!" the dick snapped. "You two guys just break out of that an' come along. We'll talk it all over with the captain."

Then he turned to the cops and told them not to disturb anything in the room, and for one of them to stay there till he was relieved, and not let anybody come in or leave.

That made me feel better, because I knew that he had brought the cops really for witnesses. Danny and me went along, and the dick said that somebody from the district attorney's office would come and talk to the rest of the gang.

At the station the captain told us we were crazy

to go gun fighting, but he did not ask many questions. He let the detective tell his story.

"When a call went out for these lads," the dick said, "I thought I would try Clancy's place. When I went in Clancy said, sure, they were upstairs playin' poker. I went up and found them in a game. I brought them along, but Clancy says they have been playin' there since ten o'clock last night, an' none of them had been out at all."

He stepped back of us, and as he went he winked a little, and that made me feel safer. I could see that our alibi would be a hard thing to beat, with eight guys to swear nobody left the poker room and with Clancy ready to do the same thing.

"You've been identified as a member of the gang that shot up a saloon last night," the captain said to me. "Knowin' that Danny and you are pals, we put in a call for both of you."

"Somebody's a cock-eyed liar," Danny answers steady and easy. "We never left Clancy's."

"I believe you, boys," the captain says, "but I'll have to hold you till we get this thing straight. I won't question you, but you probably want a lawyer."

I could see the captain was as scared and upset as we were.

"It don't take a lawyer to say we never left Clancy's," I said, making a show at being easy in the head.

We sat around the captain's room for a while and then my old man came in. He asked me to tell him the truth, so that he would know what to do, but I figured the poker alibi was so good I had better bet on that. You know, there was a chance that the big boss might not go through for the old man. Nobody can really fix a killing if they hang it on you, and, anyway, I did not want the old man to have too much on me. I told him I had been at Clancy's all night.

While he was there a man from the district attorney's office came in, and he was very nice, but sure was after information. He asked us a few questions and all we said was that we had never left Clancy's. Then he had five bums from the station picked up and he brought them into the room and lined them up with us.

In a few minutes they brought in two of the uptown gang to look at us, and I thought I was going to drop. One of the guys had his head bandaged and the other had his arm in a big sling. They were the two we had left on the floor. The guy with the bandaged head came in and walked down the line. He looked at every man very carefully. When he came to me I saw a funny light in his eye.

For just a second he looked me over, his face white and his eyes very bright and understanding, then he passed on. When he finished the line he turned around to the captain and said:

"I can't be dead sure, but I don't think any of the gang is in this line-up." I thought he was game then, but afterward Danny said he was not game; he was just mad and wanted to bump us off himself if we got out.

That lack of identification bothered the man from the district attorney's office, but it pleased the captain a lot. I could see that. At first I thought we were going to be let go, but the district attorney had another ace up his sleeve. He brought in a newsboy that had been selling papers on the corner when we went into the saloon to start the shooting.

As soon as the kid walked into the room he came right up to me and said, "That's him, mister. He was one of them. He was the first one out of the automobile, but the rest of these guys ain't the gang!"

The man from downtown laughed, but before I could deny it, the captain had cut in like he was afraid I would say too much. "Better watch out, sonny," he said to the newsboy in a friendly way, "you're sayin' a whole lot when you say that! It might mean this man would be killed and maybe you are wrong."

"I ain't wrong!" the damn kid says. "I'll swear I ain't. Gee! I'd know this guy anywhere. He was the only one I saw good, because as soon as I guessed what was up I ran."

The captain seemed worried and acted as though

he did not want to talk too much before the man from downtown, but still had a lot he would like to say. I took my cue from him and said not a thing. All through the trial and everything, I never cracked a word.

"He hangs it on you pretty strong," the man from the district attorney's office said. "I guess all we can do is make a pinch, unless this kid changes his mind."

"I won't change my mind!" the kid pipes up. I could have killed him easy about that time. "I know this guy. I ain't wrong!"

"Lock him up, captain," the downtown guy says. "Hold him as a suspect for homicide. I'll talk with you over the telephone in a little while. Let him have a lawyer if he wants; give him the breaks. I know his old man here pretty well."

My old man seemed one hundred years older all of a sudden. His face looked like it did that time when Fletch was bumped off, only it looked worse. He never could talk much when he was like that, but he came over to me and said, "Whatever happens, keep your fresh young mouth shut." Then he beat it. I kind of thought he would go straight to the big boss, but I was not sure.

The captain let the bums go, and Danny, too. As Danny went out he gave me the wink, but I never hated to see anybody leave me like I did to see Danny go. After a while the captain got rid of the

district attorney's man, and then he came to me and sat down and drummed on the table for a minute, and finally he said, "Good night, kid; this is apt to be a hell of a mess!"

"Can't you shut up that newsboy?" I asked him. "If they believe that kid I might even—might even git the—the chair for this!"

"You was there, wasn't you?" he asked. "You and all that gang at Clancy's?"

"Yes, I was," I told him, something inside me kind of quivering when I thought of the electric chair; "I was there. We all was—but you better not——"

I was just going to crack to him about what I had on him splitting with the old man and bumping off Fletch, but the way he answered me I knew he was my friend.

"I'll do whatever I can, kid," he said, his face looking quite the same as my old man's had. "I'll never see you take the rap if I can stop it. But it's a bad mess—a rotten mess."

"Scare that newsboy pink and shut him up," I said.

"Not now. That would be the worst thing in the world. But if they ain't got anything more than that on you, they ain't got much. No jury would convict you on that—not with the alibi you got. I'll handle it. Don't talk to anybody—not

even your old man. He knows I'll do whatever I can to beat this racket for you."

"I won't talk," I said, but believe me it was pretty tough going back to that cell, even if I had all the cigarettes I wanted, and got my own way, except for being locked up. It was a tough rap to think of all the gang free and me in the can just on account of that newsboy.

There was Danny and Twist and Gat and Nick, and even Slug—him that had bumped off the poor driver—all free and I was the one that was collared for the whole works. But I promised myself I would not talk no matter what happened.

The next three months got pretty bad. As long as that newsboy stuck to his story I was in for it. Even the district attorney wanted to drop the case against me. I guess the old man went after him and told him he would lose every vote in our district unless he played the game, but he could not play too strong. He had to show the public a trial.

Finally the old man got me a lawyer and demanded an immediate trial, because the captain said that was the best way to beat the case. By that time the papers had shut up a little about the shooting and we were ready to go to the bat.

All the police want when a big case comes up is a pinch, and they already had me, so the other guys in our gang were not worried very much. They never got a mention. They used to come and tell

me how game I was and how regular for not cracking anything, but I got sick of that.

Finally Mary Dix came to see me and she told me my mother was pretty sick over this thing and that my father was changing. She said the old man had wanted to run for alderman, but the big bosses would not stand for it. I guess that worried him more than what might happen to me.

After I had been three weeks in stir, my mother was able to come to see me, and at first I was glad she did. She came in and looked at me in the funniest way you ever saw, and after a long time she said, "Jimmie, did you do this awful thing?"

"No," I told her, "I never killed anybody. You oughta know that."

"Was you with the gang that night—when they did all that shooting?" she comes back at me.

I lied to her. "No," I said, "I never knew a thing about it."

For a long, long time she looked at me, and finally she got up, and she seemed to be bent over more as she stood there. There was something strange in her eyes—something I never want to see again. Her mouth looked kind of green around the lips and her cheeks were as pale as fleecy white clouds. She just stood there for a long time, and I reached out and caught her hand and tried to say something, but could not.

At last I got a little sentimental, I guess—be-

A William Fox Production.

Me-Gangster

THE NEIGHBORHOOD CHILDREN ARE INTERESTED IN THE KID'S COURTSHIP OF NELLIE REGAN THE LAUNDRY CHECKER.

cause mothers make a guy do that—and I kissed her hand. She held onto me a minute and then she put her arms around me and drew me close to her and kissed me on the lips.

Before I could say or do anything, she was talking: "You never could lie to me," she said. "You ought to know that, Jimmie. I know you were with that gang. I can see it in your eyes. I don't know what on earth is going to happen to you, but I do know that I married a crook and now I've brought one into the world too, and I guess I'm sick of it all, and don't believe in anything any more."

That was the way she went away from me, and I felt pretty rotten. I guess she could always see right through me. Mary Dix kept on coming to see me, but every time she came she would shake her head about my mother, and about two weeks before the old man made them bring me to trial on the newsboy's evidence, Mary came in one day, and I knew she had been crying and was ready to start right over again any minute.

"Don't be scared of this case, Mary," I told her, trying to cheer her up. "I'll beat it as sure as you're a foot high. What have they got on me? The word of a kid, that's all! Look at what I got for witnesses in Clancy and Twist and Danny and all the rest of them."

"I ain't scared of the case, Jimmie," she told me. "It ain't the case. I hardly ever think of that. It's

your mother. She sees through you so well and she is so unhappy because your father is a—a—a——"

"Crook!" I blurted out. "Say it. You can't hurt my feelings about the old man. I know what he is. In his own way I guess about everybody is a crook."

"Not only that"—Mary plunges on like she had a lot more to say and was going to say it all before she lost her nerve—"not only that. Your mother hates herself because she feels she brought another crook into the world."

That meant me. I was quiet for a minute, but I could see my mother had filled Mary full of women's notions, and I did not want her to turn against me. I guess I showed some temper. I said, "Aw, Mary, cut that babble about women. My mother is gettin' old and what she thinks I can't help. But a guy has got to——"

Right there Mary started crying again, and I put my arm around her and tried to make her quit, but she kept on, and finally, with her face buried on my chest and her words coming in jerks and muffled tones, she said, "Don't say that! Don't say that, Jimmie. Your mother is—Jimmie, she's dead!"

That night I did not sleep in my cell. I was wide-awake and all upset. All night long I remembered what my mother had said when she left me, and the way she had looked. I wondered if she had died on account of me. Maybe I had killed her.

IV

THROUGH the big boss, the old man got to the district attorney and managed to have my case brought up right after my mother was buried. They let me go to the funeral, but there was a strange dick on each side of me and everybody gave me the glassy eye, so I felt sure they all guessed it was my fault that my mother died.

The old man felt pretty confident that I would beat the case and he made a lot of political talk about it. I guess he figured he was in for it anyway, and might as well use it to build himself up with voters. He pretended that the whole thing was a frame-up to blacken me so that his political future would be damaged. I read in the paper where he said that everyone knew that he would be elected alderman unless some underhanded trick was done to hurt him. His political enemies, he said, had stooped to shatter the life of a mere boy in order to gain their own ends.

The old man said, in the papers, that everyone knew he was a fearless champion of the people and would defend their rights against the big-money men and the crooks. Well, as the saying is, comb

that out of your beard! Imagine my old man posing as a reformer! But, at that, it went over pretty good.

When the case came to trial my lawyer played on politics a lot, and pointed to my father as a self-made man whose enemies hated him for the good he had done the common people.

"There was but one way to reach this sturdy citizen," he cracked to the dumb jury, "and that was through the heinous blow you now see directed at his son. An only child! The apple of this fine father's eye! And they would have you believe he is a killer; a gun fighter who slinks the streets at night with an instrument of death trained upon his fellow man. I ask that you look at him; look at this beardless youth and believe, if you can, that he would kill!"

I looked as much as I could like a sap. The lawyer had a trick he did with his voice, and I almost cried myself at the way he talked.

"Already this gang of political connivers has wrought ruin in a household previously tranquil," he goes on. "Hardly cold in her heartbroken grave reposes the sanctified body of this lad's mother and this broken man's wife!"

Well, you bet, that shot the newsboy's story all to pieces. Jurors were crying, and it was easy to see that a kid like that newsboy might easily be mistaken in his identification.

I will not spend too much time on that murder trial, because everybody knows about it anyway, but I remember the way that lawyer talked and I still got his speech where I cut it from the newspapers. He was so fine and great and his voice was so soft at times, and so hard at other times, that I almost believed he was a fine man and fighting for the rights of the lowly people that get tangled up in the law. But after the trial I discovered he had fought my case so that my old man would fix charges against him for cheating a client. We never paid him a cent.

Well, I got acquitted. The jury was out only half an hour. Afterward my old man said he had the jury fixed, but I do not believe it, because that lawyer would have won anyway. The old man always wanted me to think he was a hell of a fellow.

All the papers talked a lot about the trial, and some of them, especially those that boosted my old man's political party, said the case never should have come to trial, because there was no chance of conviction and the whole thing was a dastardly attack upon my old man.

After that I thought everything was jake, and the old man felt better, because it looked like the case had made him bigger than ever; but the very gang I had formed proved to be anything but pals. Twist and Danny shook me by the hand after I was out and told me that we had the world by the tail.

"Now we can have it our own way," Twist said. "These bum cops have learned where the weight is and they will lay off'n us!"

Danny said the same thing, and they started planning out a couple of jobs that would put us on easy street. I was scared to tackle them so soon, because, after being in the can, I could see how the cops might work when they were sore on a guy, and I thought they might be following me a lot. But Twist and Danny got pretty nasty and said they had played the game as well as I had, and had gone in to testify for me, and the best thing I could do was to play the game with them. Nick Capos and Slug Dolan sided with them, and Gat Malone went so far as to say that I would find, if I quit them, that they did not care much who they shot at. That meant me again.

Mary was after me all the time to get a regular job and go straight. I asked her a good many times to marry me, but she never would. She was a bashful kid and it was a long time before I learned that she really loved me, all right, but remembered what happened to my mother and was afraid she might bring a crook into the world too.

Between the gang and Mary and the old man, I hardly knew which end I was standing on. Then, to add to it all, the guys from uptown sent word to me that they would call everything square if I

would talk with them. I was scared to go up, for fear it was a frame to get me bumped off, but I sent word back I would play the game and meet them halfway and call everything jake so there would be no more shooting.

I never mentioned this to my gang, because, except for Danny, I was kind of anxious to shake them off. Things were getting too hot. Thoughts about the smoky chair up in that gray death house make a guy think new ideas, and I had done a lot of thinking while I was in the can.

Word came back that we could meet at a hotel, and I felt pretty safe on that deal. A big hotel is no place to stage a gun fight, so I took the chance. Then it was that I met Lefty Todd, the fellow who had refused to identify me down at the station that time.

He came up to me and grinned and held out his hand. I kind of liked him at first sight. I figured a guy that can grin at you after you have busted his head open with a bullet must be pretty regular. We shook hands.

"Things ain't breaking too tough for me, Jimmie," he cracks, "and I'll go for a nice supper downstairs in the grill."

Down we go, and I got to say that Lefty knew how to make friends. The first thing he did was to shake again and swear that all was jake between us

and there would be no more shooting. Then I told him on the square that I did not pull the first robbery of that gambling house in his district, and he believed me. He asked if I would play the game with him and between us tie up the works for the whole town. He meant by that that we could run both gangs and cut into real money.

"Guys are running gambling houses around here that have a take of twenty grand a night," Lefty said, meaning that crooked gamblers caught chumps for twenty thousand dollars a night in some of the dives that were supposed to be high class. "I know the racket here, and with your old man's pull to use, we can clean up."

"I'd rather do that than throw guns," I admitted.

"Sure thing!" he snaps. "And the gambling ain't all, Jimmie. Why, there's one house in this district that peddles enough dope every week to sink a battleship. Two guys that I have something on are runners for the joint and we can take the owner for plenty through them."

It was in my mind then to make a quick clean-up and take Mary and blow the town. I was sick of the old man and I never got over worrying about what killed my mother. I knew that there were better ways to make money than stick-ups and robberies. Make it the way some of the crooked lawyers did—that was what I planned. So I said it was a bet and we shook hands again and had

another bottle to seal the bargain. Then Lefty opened up some more.

"Guys that go in the gambling houses are rich sometimes," he said. "The average bum could not do what we can, Jimmie, because we know how to dress and have a fair sounding lingo. All we got to do is find out the big mugs that break the law and then let them know we are on to them. They'll pay for silence."

"Blackmail?" I cracked.

"Call it that if you like—but there are better ways."

"How?" I asked, thinking Lefty was pretty smart, at that.

"Well," he says, "one of my pals is an assistant district attorney. All he needs is a little help from a guy like your old man and the thing is set."

"My old man never would help me none," I told him.

"Mebbe he would never know he was helping you. Those things can be worked. You see, the idea I got is for you to pretend to go straight and then get a job with this pal of mine. He runs a law office on the side, and you could work there. That will make it look to others like your old man is his friend, and that is enough."

"I'm game for that," I said, thinking I might kid Mary with the same racket. "That's a cinch."

Lefty laughed to himself and we finished our

drinks and went to see the assistant district attorney. He was a crooked little rat and his scheme was simple and safe. He was interested in a gambling house and could get the names of rich men who played. Then he would start to indict them through another assistant district attorney, and when they squealed his outside law office would manage to stop the thing before it got to the grand jury. Of course he cut in for a fat fee for acting as their lawyer. Him and Lefty wanted my name to use on account of the old man's pull.

That night I told my old man about going straight and starting the new job. When I told him where it was I thought he was going to faint away.

"That little pup," he bellowed, meaning the assistant district attorney, "has been trying to horn in with me for the last two years! He knows I could break him if I wanted to. You tell him to take his job and go to the devil. . . Anyway, you couldn't go straight! You're just naturally rotten!"

That crack from my old man made me rave inside. I felt just like I did that night he hit my mother with the glass from the desk—mad all through. His hands were soft and white now, and I figured he was getting older and could not fight so good as he did before. So I came back at him.

"Rotten, am I?" I shouts. "A fine guy you are to say that about anybody! How about yourself?

How about the foreman down on the docks splitting up with you? How about the captain luggin' in a split on the take from Clancy and Moriarity, and how about the woman with the red shades on her windows?"

That funny look came over his face again and I knew I had him on the run. I felt that the showdown had come at last and I would do better leading aces than holding them, so I went right after the old man:

"I know a heap more too. I even know a thing or two about poor Fletch who was bumped off down by the gas house! I could go on talkin' a long while without makin' you repeat yourself in rememberin' things! Don't talk to me about bein' rotten. You're as rotten as a man ever was!

"And get this straight and like it: I'm goin' to work for that guy tomorrow mornin', and if ever he loses his job I'll crack to him about Fletch and the foreman and I'll raise a lot of fire that you'll never put out. You can't run a bluff on me any more, old boy!"

He was sitting at the table by that time, and he looked just the same as he always did when he was worried or beaten for a time. I figured I had him licked a plenty, so I walked out of the room and went upstairs to bed. But after I cooled off a bit I got to thinking.

It was a cinch that Lefty Todd and that assistant

district attorney were pretty cute guys. They knew the old man would see through this new scheme, and they must have something on him that I did not know about. They were using me to force his hand. I guessed that they were scheming to use the old man as a pry on the big boss. I had never seen the big boss, but I knew well enough there was one. I also got to thinking that we were all playing a pretty dangerous game. The old man was a hard one. He might even get me bumped off to save his own skin. It would be easy to do it now because the public might believe I was a gunman, on account of my murder trial, and had been killed by some friend of that driver's who wanted revenge.

I got up and went downstairs and found the old man still sitting at the table, but this time he had a whisky bottle beside him and he was hitting the booze plenty. When I walked in he looked up at me.

"Don't think you can shut me up by bumpin' me off," I told him straight. "There are other guys that know what to do if I go by the board some dark night. You may be my old man, but I wouldn't put a trick like that past you!"

All of a sudden he started to laugh. It was the craziest laugh I ever heard. He got up and walked toward me, and I could see that he never meant to fight. He put one hand on my shoulder and there was a queer look in his eyes.

"Kid," he cracks, at the same time raising his glass and holding it in front of the light until the whisky looked like a great big ruby, "I guess you're my son, awright! And I been doin' some thinkin' since you went upstairs. When I was young I had to play the game smart to get a start at all, and now that I'm started I've got ambition, an' I can't make it work because of the things I had to do to get started."

"You're soused," I said, not exactly following his line of gab. "Talk straight United States."

He laughed again and tossed off the liquor. "Get a glass, kid"—he cracked then—"get a glass and a drink. I've just found out that a man can't plant a lemon seed and grow an orange. Nobody ever sowed wild oats and reaped pure wheat. This is my harvest time, that's all. I'm reapin', I am, an' you're the sheaves! I set out some pretty rotten stuff and thought I was wise. Well, I was. I live easy and I've got some dough, but, sure as hell, I'm just now at the reapin' stage and you're the sheaves. I got just what I planted—a dirty, rotten, crooked little rat! Let's have a drink on that."

That night we came to an understanding, and it was dawn before we got to bed. We were both drunk, but I had found new things in my old man that made him look a little different to me. The last thing he said when he staggered into his room was: "Better get some sleep now, kid, or you'll

be late gettin' to work the very first day of your new job!"

"Leave the new job to me," I remember saying to him. "I guess you know now that I ain't such a sucker."

He just laughed and shut the door, and I went into my own room and tried to think, but the bed kept going up and down like an ocean wave and I had to keep my eyes open or get sick. I went to sleep at last, but I did not do any thinking.

The next morning I was not up until eleven o'clock, and then I felt bad. I went to the assistant district attorney's office and they laughed at me for being so late. I knew they were glad to see me by the way they laughed. I could always sense things like that. It helps a lot, too, because lots of times you can get a bluff across just by knowing what the other guy is thinking.

"You didn't think I was goin' to do an awful lot of work around here, did you?" I grinned at them.

"Well," Lefty Todd said, because I found him there waiting for me, "there ain't a whole lot of work you could do. But it makes it look like a job to have you here."

"You mean," I cracked back at him, "it makes it look like this assistant district attorney is playing close with my old man!"

"Well, that way if you like it," he shrugged.

"But you guys ain't as smart as you think," I told

him. "Me and the old man got a snoot full last night an' had a love feast. I know you got somethin' on him."

"Oh, not much," Lefty grins and yawns. "We just got the dope on the dock-foreman deal, and the big boss is holdin' that over your old man's head because he was cutting in on those cases that disappeared."

Can you beat that? To think of that old racket coming to light as late as this? I certainly was surprised, but I tried not to show it.

"I guess, Lefty," I cracked, "if they really had anything on the old man they wouldn't need me."

"No? Well, it ain't our little pal that has got the stuff. It's the district attorney himself, and he got it through the retail merchants' association that has been checkin' up losses for a long time. He don't dare go after your old man on account of politics, but our little pal wants something on his boss in case anything happens to him later." All of this Lefty cracks without batting an eye.

After last night I felt a little different about the old man. I mean the way he laughed when I hung it on him made me think that maybe he was a pretty good sport after all, and he was my father and I hated to cross him.

But I never let on to Lefty, because that would spoil it all. In the back of my mind was the idea that I could beat them all at their own game.

Honor among thieves is a joke. I was finding that out and I also had found out why Lefty had refused to identify me as the man that shot him. Even then he was planning to use me.

While they were getting something on the old man through me, I figured, I would be getting something on them, and in that way protect both the old man and the real district attorney. That would put me in solid all around, and Lefty and this assistant guy could go to hell.

I mean that was the game they were playing, and I had better hold my end up too. So I laughed with Lefty and told him all I wanted was a shot at the big and easy money, and if the old man had to get caught, that was his lookout. Lefty fell for my line and everything was all set.

I hung around for a couple of hours that day, but I felt very punk, on account of the jag the night before, so I went home early. The old man was a better drinker than me. He was more used to it. So he was in good shape when I got home. That is, he did not have a hang-over, but it is not true to say he was in good shape, because he was crazy mad. The minute I came in, he walked up to me, and I could see in his eyes that he was in a fighting temper.

"Listen here, kid," he cracked, his voice steady and hard and cold. "I'll stand for you hangin'

around with this ward heeler that you got appointed assistant district attorney—I'll stand for that, because I can break him whenever I'm ready. But I'll be double damned if I'll have your bum pugs creepin' around here tellin' me what I'm goin' to do to protect them!"

"Pugs?" I asked him, surprised that all this should happen. "I don't get you. What do you mean, pugs—my pugs?"

"This Slug Dolan! That's what I mean. He's a dirty rat. A stir bug he is, and he comes here an' tells me they have knocked him off in a stick-up, an' I'll see him through or he'll crack the whole works about you and the gang that did the shooting up in the other district. I knew you did that too. This guy has got it on you right!"

Well, I went cold all over. Can you beat that for a break? Here I was, the only one that got caught on that thing, and I kept my mouth shut and took the fall for the whole gang, and now Slug was putting the rap on me with the old man!

I mean you start with a little thing and you keep on meeting guys, and somebody has to know what you are doing, and all of a sudden you are in so deep you cannot get out. Here was a stir bug that always carried a rod, and he had been to my old man, and if the old man did not play with him I was sunk!

But an idea came to me quick: "You ain't so smart," I cracked to the old man. "Not so smart. I already been tried for that murder. They can't try me twice, even if they know I am guilty. Throw that bum out."

"Throw him out, eh?" the old man snarled at me. "Throw him out an' have him spill his guts about the whole gang? Then the rest of the crew will get knocked off and convicted, and there will be another stink, just before I am to make a fight for alderman!"

"Well, fix him up, then," I answered, disgusted a whole lot with the gang and everything else. "I got a job and I'm goin' straight anyway."

"Straight is it, huh?" the old man snapped. "You couldn't go straight with a ruler! You been nothin' but a nuisance to me from the minute you were born. Now you will keep me out of the aldermanic race!"

All of a sudden I remembered what I had heard a screw in the can say when I was down there on trial. It was about the old man, and I figured I would tell him that and see what happened.

"Alderman?" I cracked, sneering at him. "You for alderman, eh?" Then I pulled the screw's line: "Why, listen, if you was elected alderman they would close the city hall! A guy with a mug like yours, and the gas house table manners that are all you know, would make the joint look like a greasy, one-arm sailor's hash house on a Chinese dock!

You're nothin' but a cheap politician; a bum mick that can handle laborers and drink cheap booze and buy ginny votes. Forget that alderman laugh!"

I know it got under his skin, because he went dead white for a second, stared straight into my eyes, then, before I knew a thing was stirring, he knocked me cold with his big right hand.

V

WHEN I came to after my father had knocked me down, it was a couple of minutes before I could realize just what had happened. By the time I had a chance to do anything about the blow, he was gone. I think he waited just long enough to see whether I was really going to come out of it, then beat it.

I have said elsewhere that he was a very hard fighter and never was afraid of anything on two feet, but perhaps that was when he worked on the docks and before his hands got white and soft. It looked, when he beat it, as though he did not want to give me a chance to fight back.

I could hear him going out of the door, and as long as he was gone, I let the thing rest there. If we were going to fight, I would rather wait until later, because a good punch makes a lot of difference, and he had hit me a beauty. So I went to the buffet and got me a good stiff drink.

After that I looked in the mirror and saw that my chin had quite a lump on it where his fist had landed. It would not do to go out and have people see that. They would think it funny anybody would dare hit me as long as I was the gang leader.

Also, if somebody got bumped off about that time, I might be suspected, because people would think I had been in a fight. After you get a reputation there are all kinds of things like that happen to you. Things you never knew a thing about come to your coop to roost.

Lefty Todd would be sure to ask me about it if I went to the office next morning. If I told him I was in a fight he would want to start both gangs out to square it. If I told him my old man had hit me, it would spoil my pull with them, because it would show him that me and the old man were fighting between ourselves. You can see the shape I was in. It kept getting harder and harder to decide which way to turn.

I wanted to have a talk with Danny and I wanted to see Mary. I called Mary on the telephone and told her I felt bad and asked her if she would come over to see me. She said she would not, but I could come to see her if I wanted to. I always figured that the way to handle a girl is to run her and make her think you do not care much about her in the little things, so I said I would not go.

Mary told me over the telephone that evening that she had made up her mind to be a nurse and was going to enter training in a big hospital in our town. She said that was the way she could do the most good and it would always mean a good living for her even when she got pretty old. I told her

that was fine, but she would be better off to marry me and we would leave town and settle down somewhere else among strangers and I would get a job and go straight.

"I know you think you mean it now, Jimmie," she told me, "but I know you never could do it."

"I could too," I said. "I am working right now and will make good money and stick at it."

But she would not fall for it. "Going straight is not just keeping out of trouble, Jimmie," she cracked. "It comes from inside a man; from his heart, and you haven't found it yet. I hope sometime you will. I should think your mother——"

"Aw, rot!" I snapped at her, and hung up the receiver and went and took another drink. Women are always talking sentiment and being sad. But I felt bad and I hoped she would call me back, but she did not. That made me feel worse, but I would not call her back, so I telephoned to Clancy's and asked Clancy if Danny was there.

"Yes," said Clancy, "he's here. An' so is your father. What is the matter with the old boy? He blew in here and started buyin' drinks for the house. He'll be soused in another half hour the way he's goin' at it."

"Lemme speak to Danny," I cracked, "an' let the old man get as soused as he wants." Clancy laughed and in a minute Danny came to the telephone and said he would be right over.

"Twist an' Dandy are here too," he said. "They will come with me."

"I don't want them," I told Danny, but he had hung up the receiver and did not hear me, so I knew the three of them would come in a few minutes.

I bathed my chin with cold water and it did not look so bad, but I was afraid they would see it. Then I set out a bottle and some glasses from the old man's private stock and in a minute the three of them were there. They all took a drink and I had another with them.

"You look like the wrath of Gawd," Twist tells me as he wiped off his mouth after the drink. "What's eatin' you?"

"I was soused last night," I answered.

"Yeah? What's the matter with your kisser? Did somebody bust you on the chin?" He came close to me and looked at the lump.

"Yes. I got to foolin' around with the old man and he biffed me accidentally."

None of them said anything, but they all looked like they knew I was not telling them the truth. Dandy helped himself to another drink and after a few minutes he said to Twist, "Why not crack the racket?"

Twist laughed and looked at me. "We got some dough for you, Jimmie," he said, at the same time reaching into his pocket and dragging out a big roll of bills. "This is your end of that job Slug and

Gat and Dandy and me pulled off this afternoon."

He handed me seven hundred dollars. "What job?" I asked him. "I never knew about any job being pulled off."

They all laughed and said that pals did not have to know everything while it was happening and they had pulled off a fast one and, of course, kept my share for me, because we were all partners. They tried to make it look natural, but something told me it was all wrong.

I handled the money a minute, then I threw it on the table and told them to take another drink. "I wasn't in on the job," I said, "an' I don't want any cut of the loot."

"But pals are pals, Jimmie," Dandy said sharply. "We want to share and share alike. You can trust us all the way. When we are playing with pals that's the way we play."

"I don't want the dough," I said, my suspicions telling me that something was back of it all—something I could not see.

"But, by jiminy, you'll take it!" Twist snapped. "I guess mebbe you think you will do a run-around on us, eh? You'll take the dough or admit that you are tryin' to break with us, and that won't prove so very healthy either!"

That was what had scared me all the time. They thought I was crossing them. I was supposed to be the leader of the gang, but a blind man could

see that it was every man for himself and this seven hundred dollars never would have come my way unless I was to pay mighty well for it.

"What job was it you pulled?" I asked them.

"That pay-roll job down at the warehouses," Dandy answered. "We stuck up the paymaster—don't you read the papers?"

"I was soused last night and I don't feel very good. I ain't looked at the papers today."

Danny hunted around and found the old man's paper and there was the whole story on the front page. The paymaster had been stuck up in broad daylight and robbed of nearly four thousand dollars in bills. I only read the headlines.

All of a sudden it dawned on me that this was the very job had made the old man so mad. I guessed right away that Slug had been collared for it and sent word to the old man. For a few minutes I never said a word, then I asked, trying not to show more than normal interest, "Did you make a clean get-away?"

Twist laughed a very hard little laugh. "I guess you know we didn't," he cracked. "I guess that rough foolin' with your old man was over Slug, wasn't it?"

So the cat was out of the bag. Somehow they had got Slug for this job and not all the others. I looked at Danny and figured that he would tell me the truth if anybody would.

"Danny," I said to him, "tell me what happened."

"Slug and Nick and Dutch are collared," he said.

"How many of you were there when they pulled the job?"

"Just them three—Slug and Nick and Dutch," he answered.

"Who made the pinch?"

"Strange bulls from downtown farther. The tip is out that our captain is going to be transferred because the gang is getting too fresh around here."

"How soon were they caught after they pulled the job?"

Before Danny could answer, Twist cut in: "They got caught in the get-away," he snapped. "It's all in the papers there. You know it well enough. And you might as well know all the sad news at once. The cops got the pay roll back and those three guys are due for a sweet stretch. They'll get ten to fifteen as sure as you're a foot high. That is, they will unless your old man stops it—an' he's goin' to stop it, savvy?"

"Did he say he would?" I asked, sparring for time and trying to think of a way out for me.

"I said he would," Twist cracked back vicious like. "I say so. If he don't those three guys will talk, and that means a pretty stretch for all of us on that uptown shooting thing."

"I should worry about the shooting thing," I

tried to laugh. "I been tried and acquitted. They can't even try me again!"

"Oh, yes, they can! Don't kid yourself, Jimmie. They'll take you in as an accessory, and on this new evidence they will send you to the chair as pretty as they do Slug. You was tried for murder, and the two are different. They'll take you, all right, if those guys talk."

"I didn't talk when I was in," I charged.

"You ain't a stir bug like Slug. If he'll shoot an innocent guy just to save himself from another stretch, it's a cinch he'll turn state's evidence if he gets half a chance."

"Then this seven hundred dollars never came from that pay roll?" I asked. "You made it up between you just to get me in on the deal! If I was in, you figured the old man would have to kick in with his influence and stop prosecution."

"Sure," Danny grinned at me. "But seein' you don't want the dough, we'll make him kick in anyhow!" He picked up the money and winked at Twist as he stuffed it into his pocket.

"Never turn down cash, Jimmie," Twist grinned at me. "We thought we'd make it softer for you, but now you'll take the job without the money, and we'll make you like it."

"Even you guys knew nothing about the stick-up of the paymaster till after it was over, did you?" I asked.

"Not till these other three saps were in the can," they admitted. "But the stick-up don't faze us. It's what them three can and will say that worries us. We'll all go over the jumps for that gang fight as soon as Slug starts talking."

I sat down at the table and took another drink. I mean, when things break against you, what are you going to do? Every way I turned there was trouble and it looked as though I would have to try and settle with the old man and see that he fixed this jam. But even after he did, what then? Those crooks would be in another jam in a week and we would have the whole thing to do over again. The old man was smart enough to know that. I was not sure I could do a thing with him.

Finally I looked up at Danny and said, "I never figured you to cross me up."

"Me?" he gruntled. "How have I crossed you? They got me in the same mess. I don't want to go over the long road any more than you do and the only chance we got is through your old man!"

I have got to admit that I felt licked. After me telling the old man that stuff about running for alderman, I knew he hated me. As near as I could see, all he had to do was say that his son was no good and go on fighting what he liked to call the battle of the common people.

Even if he never was elected alderman on account of me, he would still be a committeeman, and

that was not so tough. The talk was all over that he never would be alderman anyway, because the big bosses would stop it on account of his education and the way he ate. But he could pick the man to be elected, and that meant just as much or even more power, because he could make the man he picked do things as alderman he never would dare to do himself.

So I was up against it good and hard. The three guys just stood around and looked at me, and finally Danny laughed and threw the bills back on the table and said, "Well, you're in for the rap anyway, so you might as well take the dough and use it."

I picked up the bills and put them in my pocket, and just as I did the front door of the house opened and I knew it was the old man. I thought maybe he would make a lot of trouble finding the guys there, but, after all, maybe they could make him see things better than me, so I did not make them beat it.

Pretty soon he walked into the room and looked us over. Clancy was wrong when he said the old man was getting drunk. He was sober as a judge and there was that strange light in his eye which I could always tell meant trouble.

"Oh," he cracked, his mouth set in a smirk, "I see you got some friends in for the evening."

Twist laughed a little and answered, but his voice showed he was none too comfortable: "Hello,

chief. We just blew in to see Jimmie, because he was feelin' low."

The old man glanced around the room a moment, then snapped his fingers, and before you could wink three cops were in the door and they had their guns out and trained on us. Right there I knew my father had decided to fight Slug Dolan to the last ditch. After all, there was nothing else for him to do. If my gang ever got their claws into him they would break him mighty quick. It would be one thing after another, and even a district committeeman has his limits. I sat there and never said a word.

"Dandy, an' you, Twist," the old man said, his voice sounding like the bite of a file on hard steel, "I guess these boys have got somethin' to say to you." Before they could answer, he turned to the cops. "An' don't say it here," he grunted. "Take the little yeggmen where they belong. They ain't fit to be with decent people. Take 'em in on a murder charge!"

"Yes, sir," the sergeant snapped. "Come along, you guys. The less you say the better your break will be!" He waved his gun at them and then ordered a cop to fan them. When that had been done the police had both of them cold for carrying weapons. Danny looked at me and I looked at Danny. The cops never made a start for us at all.

I looked at the old man, but his mouth was set and there was real fight in his eyes.

"You guys don't know what you're playin' around with," Twist cut in to the cops. "Believe me this goes deep. You better lay off."

"Take the yeggs out of here," my old man cracked. "They got no right here an' they ought to be run in. Let them say whatever they please."

"What the hell's your game?" Dandy asked my old man. "You think you can get away with this stuff? We'll have you in, first thing you know! If we hang, your kid does too!"

"Bunk!" the old man sneered. "Take 'em along. Take down whatever they say an' use it against 'em!"

Twist and Dandy started more talk, but the cops were rough with them and out they went. The old man stood looking at Danny and me for several seconds, and even though I knew he was working some pretty slick scheme, I was scared.

At long last he walked over to the table and took a big drink. Then he dropped into a chair, crossed his knees in satisfaction and lit one of his famous cigars. The cigar worked its way into the corner of his mouth and then stuck up to a level with his eye.

"Well, kid," he cracked after a minute more of silence, "us Murphys ain't so bad, at that!"

"You sure done more than you know when you

sent them two guys in," I moaned. "They'll make plenty of fire!"

"They will, eh?" he sneered. "They'll hang somethin' on us, eh? Wait an' see. Sit down, Danny; make yourself easy. It may take me a little time to tell you two fine dopes just what you are goin' to do. . . . Take a drink, both of you. Get the dust out of your brains a bit and grab onto what I'm tellin' you."

Danny slumped into a chair and I heard the neck of the bottle play a tattoo on the rim of his glass as he poured a drink. The old man heard it too, because he laughed easily and said, "Game guys, you two. Bad gun fighters. But when you see a real jam ahead you quiver so you can't pour a drink!"

I never felt so cheap in my life. When he was in a fighting mood there was that thing about the old man. He could make a mayor feel like a ward constable. The cigar in his mouth did a continuous dance from the clamping of his teeth, and the fire on its end was only a little redder than his eyes.

"Those guys have got a lot on you, haven't they?" he demanded. "You might just as well tell me the truth. I know it anyway."

"I'll say they have!" I groaned. "Slug and Nick and Dutch——"

"Yes," the old man interrupted, "an' Twist an' Dandy an' Gat. Oh, I know the story! Know it

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Me-Gangster.

THE GANG OUTLINES TO THE KID WHAT HIS PART WILL BE IN THE NEXT JOB.

well. Don't think I'm goin' it blind on this thing. I don't work that way."

"Maybe not on your own racket," I countered, "but how about us? Only last night I figured you might get me bumped off just to save yourself. Now I guess you'll let the state do the job an' save yourself the trouble. But——"

"Don't be a fool, kid!" he growled. "Blood is thicker than water. After all, you're my kid. An' besides, I've got to think about other things than just you. I'm goin' to be elected alderman no matter what anybody else says. That's what made me so mad at you when you cracked about education an' my manners. The bosses are sayin' the same thing. I know it. But wait an' see. I'll run, an' I'll be elected, or every police official and crook in the town will go back to work!"

Danny steadied a little as the old man talked and leaned over and poured another drink, but when he swallowed it he gulped like a pig.

"Now you listen to me," my father went on. "You were just goin' to tell me that if I framed you, you would tell a few things you know. Well, tell 'em.

"But I ain't goin' to frame you. I'm goin' to get you out of this mess, an' I'm the only man that could. I know those yeggs will squawk! Know it as well as you do. That's just what I want them to do. Just what I expect. They are double-crossin'

rats, all of 'em. So I crossed them first an' I saved you young fools by doin' it.

"They go in for murder—see?" he went on. "Plain murder—an' the evidence is all set to convict every one of them. The world'll be better off without 'em, anyhow."

"But they'll drag us into the same killing!" I cried, thinking about the way Slug had bumped off that poor driver.

"Yeah?" he sneered, his eyes shining again and his shoulders heaving upward in pride the while his cigar danced more rapidly than ever. "They will, huh?"

"Certainly they will," Danny managed to say. He was hunched in his chair and his face was blanched and his hands worked together between his knees. "You know we was in that fight. We led the gang up there an' Slug bumped the driver without our expectin' it."

The old man got up and walked across the room. On his way back he stopped at the table and filled his glass. Then he filled Danny's and mine. With his free hand he took the cigar out of his mouth and lifted his glass up to the light again.

"Stand up," he said, "stand up an' drink to the best man you ever drank with!" His voice boomed out in laughter that filled the whole house.

"You thought you had somethin' on the old man, eh, kid?" he said to me. "Thought you was pretty

safe because I bumped off Fletch that time, or had him bumped off. Oh, I admit it! Me an' the captain had that job done nice an' handy without no fuss to speak of." He paused, flirted his glass and drained it with a grunt of satisfaction.

"And now lemme tell you. All your gang, exceptin' you, are in for that particular killin', an' they can't win. The cards are set. The case is complete. The Honorable James Murphy, leader of the gas house district and self-made defender of the common people, has brought just six gunmen to a deserved justice and made his district safe for——" His voice trailed off in laughter again.

"You mean," Danny said, his tongue rattling like the words were solid things that scraped across it, "that you framed these guys for killin' Fletch?"

"Certainly! That clears the captain an' me forever more. It brands anything they say about you two as lies; a cheap attempt on their part to strike back at the man that brought them to the bar of justice, which man is me, savvy? We got witnesses that will stand out like the dial on a money box—that's what we have. An' when those yeggs crack about the uptown gun fight, all it will mean is a lot more fine publicity for the Honorable James Murphy!" He laughed again, and in his voice there was a note of exultation and pride.

"By heavens," I muttered to Danny, "the old man is right. All those guys took the stand and

swore at my trial that they never left Clancy's the night of the shootin'. It looks like the old man has turned a neat trick, at that!"

"He has," the old man snapped at me. "A trick that only a man with a lot of weight could pull off, believe me. Never speak to me about nerve again. Nor brains neither. I got all that was give to this Murphy family!" I could not speak, and Danny did not. Somehow the whole thing was—well, ghastly. He did it so easy and was so sure of himself.

"Wait till you see the evidence in the papers tomorrow," he laughed. "Wait till you read about me workin' with the police for endless weeks an' finally winnin' out an' bringin' this gang of killers to the bar of justice. . . . I like that phrase—that bar of justice!" Once again he laughed. "What I done, an' all I done, was beat them to the punch! An' the district attorney won't know a pinch has been made until these mugs read my statement in the morning papers. After that they will fold up an' take the rap. They can't do anythin' else! They won't do much talkin'. The captain'll see to that."

Danny and me sighed in relief. I hated to see guys framed, but they were framing me even as the old man worked this trick. It was a case of them or us, and it had to be them. But you got to hand it to the old man, because he was smart; he planned that one thing to wipe the slate clean for all of us.

"An' now," he went on, posing before Danny and me like an actor on the stage, "just to show you that I ain't too far behind you when it comes to brains, I'll take the seven hundred dollars you got from those chumps, kid!"

I gave him the money without a word. I would have thought he was a wonder if he had not asked for that money, but when he cracked that I saw through the whole thing. Clancy was the man who worked it. Clancy was the man who knew Twist was going to give me the money, because that was decided in his place, so Clancy must have told the old man about it.

I could see that easy enough, because the old man would have to fix Clancy for testifying for us if the gang talked. Clancy would have to swear again that we never left the poker room that night of the uptown gun fight. And I knew, even as the old man strutted around and boasted, that Clancy himself would get the seven hundred dollars.

But that made no difference. Danny and me had to admit that the old man had plunged and won for us, and for himself too. And that was what counted. I felt so good about it, and so relieved, that I went to the telephone and called up Mary, but the woman there told me that she had left for the hospital and was going to live there after that.

VI

IF I tell too much about the trial of the six men that had been our gang, it will make trouble. I have to be very careful about that, because those things go very deep. But they were tried.

With the old man backing the district attorney the thing went through like greased lightning. Within a week of the time they were arrested they had been indicted, and the papers told every day about how the district attorney was going to rush the processes of justice. Just as soon as all this broke I told Lefty I would not show at the assistant district attorney's outside office because that would make it look bad, and he agreed with me. So I had nothing but time on my hands.

I missed Mary a lot. They had regulations up at the hospital and she did not get much time to leave the place. I saw her once or twice and she seemed happier up there. There was a queer manner about her. I had noticed it for quite a while, ever since my mother died. It was as though she had reached a big decision and was fixing up her life to match the decision.

People are that way. After a man decides to do a certain thing and devotes his life to it he gets sort

of settled. Mary had that look and manner—a happy manner, like she was dead sure she was right. Once again I asked her if she loved me.

"Yes, Jimmie," she said slowly; "I really and truly love you. I guess I always have. And I think you love me."

"Then why not get married?" I cracked again. "That would change everything for me, Mary."

"It would change a lot," she admitted, "but the one thing I want changed would remain the same."

"And that?"

"Well, you are a crook, Jimmie. I never could marry a crook."

That made me sore and I walked away from her and told myself I never would bother with her again. A man is an awful fool at times. Mary is the finest girl I ever knew. I have said before that she is waiting for me and I often think how wise she was not to marry me during those days when I asked her so often.

Suppose we had married and she had not learned nursing? Where would she be now, with me doing time? But anyway, I was alone a lot and lonesome. Ever since Danny had sort of half helped Twist and Dandy to put that thing over on me about the seven hundred dollars, I was afraid of him.

The papers told all the evidence they had against the gang and I had to take my hat off to the captain and the old man. They had dug up witnesses who

had no criminal record to swear that they saw Fletch killed in an argument down by the gas house. The jewelry the captain had planted on poor Fletch was used as evidence of a gang fight over cutting up loot, and three men who worked on the docks swore that they knew Slug and Twist and Dandy and Nick as the men who started the shooting at Fletch.

The lawyers assigned each man by the courts had to depend on political pull to get other assignments, and that was the way they made their living—defending crooks without lawyers of their own. They knew my old man could have them thrown out of court if he wanted to. So they had to be careful.

When the tip went around that the old man wanted a conviction, those lawyers lost interest in the case. They fought it, of course, enough to get their fee, but the result was a foregone conclusion and everybody knew it. I knew it too, knew that those guys were as good as gone once the machine got them in bad. The old man was engineer of the machine and I knew he would get them plenty. The idea worried me a lot.

After all, when you have gone out with a bunch like that, all of you loaded with rods and ready to start shooting, they are different to you; they stick in your mind as pals. I hated to see them take the rap even though they had let me take it during my trial for murder. It bothered me.

I got to thinking that perhaps other people knew

about the frame-up and what they must be thinking about me when I let my pals go to the chair. I was awful sorry for the gang and awful scared too; I got to admit that.

There was a good chance that some of their friends I did not know might bump me off some dark night. But aside from that, I was afraid to think of them going to the smoky seat while I was living on the fat of the land. It was a mixture that I felt—a mixture of fear and sorrow—and I got to hating myself.

I finally decided I had to do something about it, even if it made me confess I was in with them on the gang shooting and take the rap with them. So I went straight to the old man and we sat at the dining-room table and talked it all over.

"These guys are getting a tough break," I told him. "They are my pals and I got to do something for them. Otherwise I would go goofy thinkin' about 'em."

The old man sat very still, but his eyes found mine and he never moved them an inch. There was that funny fighting light in them and I saw that his jaw was set hard and his lips twisted a little into a smirk.

"Oh, goin' to show yellow, huh?" he sneered. "You're about the cheesiest combination I ever met up with. How the devil Jim Murphy had to breed a kid like you, I don't know!"

"That's all right," I cracked back at him. "At that, maybe a kid that'll stand by his pals ain't so tough. All that's botherin' me is this business of sending my own buddies over the road to the chair."

"Bunk!" he snarled. "Pals!" There was blazing scorn in his tone. "Those guys would frame you quick as a wink. Don't be a fool. If I didn't have them covered from every angle they would get you from their cells!"

"I gotta do somethin'," I repeated kind of doggedly. "I can't stand by quiet an' see them all get the limit."

I guess anybody could see that I meant what I said. I know I did mean it too. Even more than the fear of being bumped by the gang was just the thought of letting a pal go across on such a rotten frame-up. The old man poured us both a drink. Sometimes when he was thinking pretty hard he used to clench and unclench his fists and chew his mustache. He was doing that now, and the gesture pulled down one side of his face and made his right eye look big and dangerous.

"All right," he cracked at last, just like he was willing to help me; "we'll do somethin'. What'll it be?"

"What'll we do, you mean?" I asked him. I was sparring for time, because I knew that whenever the old man seemed to agree with anybody, and especially with me, he had something up his sleeve.

"Yeah. What'll we do?"

"Well, I was goin' to ask you that——"

"You ask me about everythin', don't you?"

"You only think I do. You're smart—I admit that—but there are other smart guys too."

"Why not ask them? I don't want to be bothered fussin' around with the likes of you."

"You're in on this deal," I cracked back at him, like that explained everything. Then I got up and drank the whisky at a gulp and started walking the floor. I felt just that way. I had to be doing something all the time. The minute I sat down I felt jumpy and nervous and had to get up and move around. The old man was laughing at me again. That soft laugh which, after all, was so hard.

"You mean, kid, that you know I'm the only one that can do anything," he grinned.

"Mebbe that's it," I admitted. "I know you could if you would."

"Sure I can, an' I will! You just tell me what to do."

"Well," I mumbled uncertainly, "get 'em a ten-year stretch for manslaughter. Keep 'em outa the chair anyway. Later on you can fix the parole board and spring them outa the can."

He laughed. "More nonsense!" he exploded after a minute. "Stop an' think a minute. Imagine those birds in the can, with each day seemin' six months long an' their minds festerin' under the

frame-up we fixed for 'em! Just picture that, will you? You know Slug Dolan. Do you want to have five other stir bugs hangin' up there in the big home achin' for a chance to spill all they know? Do you want that? Do you want every crook in the can to know how these birds were framed an' who done it?" Once more he laughed sneeringly.

"You talk like a warty jellyfish! Some reform candidate will come along before many months an' be elected to office. That would give them their chance to talk, an' what a pile o' talkin' they could do! What meat their conversation would be for a mug that was shoutin' reform!" His right fist was working open and shut as he talked and the knuckles were white with the pressure of his grip. "They'd hang it on us inside of six months, you fool!" he finished savagely.

"Well, get 'em life, then," I cracked. "Do anythin' to keep 'em from the chair!"

"An' if I don't?"

"Then I will!" I said. "I'll go to the bosses an' tell 'em all I know. I'll take the rap myself to save them."

The old man stood up and poured another drink. He swallowed it and never even twisted his face. He was that kind of a drinker; he really liked liquor. Then he lit a cigar and, as he puffed, his right fist kept opening and closing. I knew I had him stumped. The smoke was hanging in front of his

face, but I could see his eyes through it and knew that he was weighing me and what I had said.

"I guess, by gorry, you would!" he said at long last, and there was a good deal of surprise in his voice. "Yeah, at that, I guess you would!"

"Sure as flaming hell, I will!" I threatened.

"Sit down," he snapped, his voice a little softer. "You are as free from brains as a pig is from feathers! Lemme talk to you. Lemme show you a couple of things you don't seem to savvy. The minute you go there an' squawk, in you go! The district attorney has built his case the way I wanted it. What can he do now? The courts and the people won't believe you, an' all you would gain would be a dead loss. Those yeggs are headed for the chair as sure as you're a foot high. If you want to go with them, you've picked the best way I know!"

When he mentioned the chair I kept thinking about the time I was on trial for murder and the visions I had of the little gray hall with the smoke seat at the end of it. He had me there. That is a terrible thought to keep thinking on for days and days.

He knew he had me; he laughed just a little and said, "Well, we won't do that, I guess. Now what is your next best bet?"

I was desperate. "See the district attorney and put the screws on him," I cracked. "Get 'em off with life."

"That is worse yet," he answered very calmly. "That would still leave 'em around to talk when the chance came, and anyway, the district attorney can't do that, because he would hang himself. He has fixed the case the way we wanted it. The press has painted these yeggs as desperate guys; how can the district attorney stop now? These guys are as good as convicted and everybody knows it. Can you imagine a district attorney askin' for second degree when he has already won on a first degree? That would make a nice smell for the other political party to build on!"

"You're so smart," I cracked helplessly, "you could find a way to fix it."

"You are dumber than I thought," he came back at me. "Don't you think there are other bosses? Don't you think there are guys higher up in the organization than me? I can get away with a lot, but I got to play the game with them. How can they keep me committeeman here if I get in too big a jam? What chance would I have for alderman?"

That was a big thing for him to say. It was the first time I ever heard him admit anybody was bigger than himself, and the minute he said it I knew I had him worried for fear I would do something foolish. He went on talking before I could answer.

"You gotta see that this thing is a system. Once you get something started you can't always stop it. I'm boss down here, but the whole system is run

from headquarters. The only way I stay boss is by playin' with bigger bosses, an' that's why I get the appointments to give out an' the control I have over other officers of the city an' county an' state. I pull out the votes. The whole thing is a machine. Try throwin' a wrench in it an' see where you come out!

"I'm tellin' you that there ain't a thing we can do, kid. These birds tried to frame both you an' me. We come off first best, that's all. They gotta go the route because we started 'em an' can't quit. If you open your mouth, all you'll get is a ride with 'em. The system is grindin' un'erstand? Grindin' it is an' nothin' will stop it. I gotta admit I kinda like you for stickin' by your friends, but you shut up an' go your way. Leave this with me!"

He was right. I could see that; see that anything I could do would hang me cold and high and dry and never help the gang a bit. I hated to admit it; hated and feared the thoughts I could not shake off; but I could take it or leave it and that was all. The gang had to go. The old man showed me that the system must work or collapse. They intended to keep it working and the gang was the victim.

"I suppose you win," I admitted, a groan in my voice.

"Sure I do. I always do," he boasted. "It's like a crooked card game—you can't lose if you're on the inside."

I turned to leave, but he poured a drink and told me it would brace me up and I must not be yellow about this trial. "As long as it had to come, kid," he went on easy and free like, "we might as well use it to our advantage. I intend goin' to the city hall, an' this conviction will go a long way to help me. You'll leave the trial to me, huh?"

I promised I would, because what else was there to do? I was licked and so was the gang. The old man was in the saddle for the system and he was going to ride across the finish line one hundred miles the winner.

"An'," he went on as a parting shot, "watch me work. You'll see how much of a chance that bunch and their friends will get against us. They won't even get a shot at crackin' more than their real names!"

It was surprising how well the gang's talk was kept out of the papers. Their own lawyers convinced them they ought to keep quiet about me and the old man, because if they cracked anything on us, everyone would say they were just trying to get back at him for getting them arrested. You can see the chance they had. They were licked before they started. In order to make a warning to all the underworld, the district attorney pleaded for a death sentence. He got that too. Everyone of them was sentenced to the chair and, as you may know by this time, everyone of them went to his death.

VII

BY the time all this was done I was twenty-two years old, and maybe I was beginning to get more sense. The death of those guys went deep with me. I was not responsible and they had earned that sentence, but it went deep. It seemed to bring home to me the rottenness of life and the slim chances a man has got when he starts going wrong.

I saw I could not win. I saw that even the old man must have his day of reckoning. And when that day came we would all do some pretty tall paying! I told him that honestly; told him I would really like to go straight and wanted a chance. He laughed at me when I asked him to get me a political job. He said I never would work.

I saw Mary after that trial ended and told her how I felt. There was a glad light in her eyes, just from the way I said it, but she did not seem to take me very seriously. When I asked her why not, she said again that reform came from inside a man and when it showed there I would really feel it.

"But it is inside me," I told her. "I'd love to get a decent job and really keep straight!"

"When you are truly reformed, Jimmie," she

cracked, "the thing you will think about least is the future. You will dwell a whole lot on the past and try to find some way to make up for it."

Mary was always cracking queer things like that, but I felt sober and serious, so I tried to make her tell me all she thought.

"I'm sorry for all I've done," I told her, "an' I'd square it if I could. But how can I?"

"There is only one way," she said, cool as an ice cake. "If you owe something to society, pay it!"

"But how? The money is gone, or most of it."

"Not in money. How do all criminals pay their debt to society?"

"In the can, I guess," I grinned. "That's the only way they could."

"Then why not that? When you are reformed inside, you will do that."

"What!" I gasped. "Do you mean to tell me you think I ought to go to the police and ask to be put away for what I've done?" I thought she was kidding me along, but she was not. She meant every word of it.

"An' you claim to love me?" I said, very sore at her.

"It is because I love you that I feel this way," she said.

"Nobody," I told her, "would send anybody they love to a prison. Why, look what it done to Slug Dolan!"

"Nobody that is fine and noble and sincere would marry a crook if they knew it," she answered me; "and I want to be fine and noble. Look at your mother. It killed her knowing she had brought you into the world. Honest people hate crooks, Jimmie. I would rather work at scrubbing all of my life than have a child of mine a crook!"

Well, you can see that I thought she had gone nuts. If you ask me, the idea of me going to the cops and confessing all I had done and asking to be put away was enough to make a snake's hips wiggle!

"You'll never marry me till I do that?" I asked Mary.

"Never," she answered. "You may as well know the truth, Jimmie."

"Then I'll find me a real girl," I told her, "an' get married within a year. You ain't the only girl alive!"

She never answered; just patted my hand a bit and smiled that confident and satisfied smile of hers, and we separated. Just how funny life is, you can see from the fact that Mary was right all the time, and that is why I am here. I saw it her way at last and that is why she is waiting.

I used to think I was game when I was lugging a rod and talking tough with gangsters, but the only real nerve I ever showed in my life was when I gave myself up and took the rap. The way I feel now, it was the only time I ever showed good sense too.

But here I am ahead of my story again and I really want to stick to telling things just as they happened.

As I said, I was lonesome. The old man got real jovial after the trial and conviction, and when that gang was finally bumped off he got really good to me.

"Keep out of jams," he used to say to me. "I'll give you enough money to get along on. It takes brains and guts to play with these crooks an' I ain't sure you got either one of them!"

"I want a job, that's what I want. Get me a soft job in some city department."

"You would have me in a jam in thirty minutes after you landed there," he grinned. "Honest, kid, you ain't got the brains to keep from being a mark for these people. They are smart, and every department in the city is tied in with them one way or another. As long as you are known as my kid they will all be after you with schemes that you ain't got sense enough to see through. . . . You keep away from this Lefty Todd—hear me? He is a smart crook."

"Suppose he comes after me and cracks something about what the district attorney knows about the dock foreman and you?" I asked him. I thought that might scare him a little more. But it did not. He just laughed.

"Tell him to jump in the lake if he comes to you-

Tell him I broke his boss just by snappin' my fingers an' I'll send him over for plenty if he monkeys with you."

"Was it you that got that assistant district attorney fired?" I asked him.

"It wasn't nobody else," he boasted, throwing out his chest. "An' I don't mind tellin' you that I even own his gamblin' house now! It don't pay to cross with Jim Murphy, kid. It just don't pay! I'm the biggest district boss in this town. I'll be an alderman when I get ready."

But I got to missing Danny more and more. It is a terrible thing to like somebody like I did Danny and then find you cannot trust him. Maybe I put too much thought in that deal over the seven hundred dollars, but experience is bound to teach a guy, and I never yet met a crook that would not squawk to save his own skin.

At last I went around to see the captain and I told him about my talks with the old man and how I really wanted a job. I figured he might get me one and then convince the old man I ought to take it.

I also thought that if I got a job and stuck to it Mary would forget that nonsense about giving myself up, and later on marry me. I loved Mary then even as much as I do now. Women may be nutty, and I guess most of them are, but Mary is different, and I wish the world was full of people like her.

The captain had grown gray during the last three or four years. You know, no matter how smart a man is he will grow gray if he is crooked. There is so much to worry about and you are always in the hands of people you do not trust any too much. But he listened to me and then told me that I had better do whatever the old man told me.

"Your old man is a tough egg, Jimmie," he smiled sourly, "but he is smart and he has the courage of a lion on the trail of raw meat. He is getting bigger all the time, and right now there is not another boss in town that wants to cross up with him."

"But," I told him, "the old man wants me to sit around all the time, and I hate that."

"Have you split up with Danny Critch?"

"Nope. Not exactly split up."

"You ain't going to pull together on rackets, though?"

"No. I guess anything I ever do, I'll do alone. What I really want is to get me a job and be decent. I mean that, captain."

"Mebbe you do. But take my advice and stick to what your old man tells you. He knows best. He just fixed that fool detective for grafting, and a man that can do that has really got brains and pull."

"Why can't you get me a city job?" I kept after him. "Even if it was sidewalk inspector, it would do. I know that everybody thinks it's funny I live without workin' at all, an' since the gang went for

the fall they may be thinkin' I'm livin' on what we all stole together and that I sent 'em away just to get what we might have had."

"Did you have anything?" he asked, and I could see right away that he never would change.

"Not a dime, captain. There was an even seven hundred dollars that they tried to slip me the night they were knocked off at our house, but I gave that to the old man."

"Well," he said after awhile, "I'll go so far as to talk with your father, because there may be something to what you say about its lookin' better if you went to work. But whatever he says, I would stand to if I were you."

"Suppose he should die an' leave me nothin'?" I asked, feeling rather foolish as I did.

"That guy will never die," he muttered, and there crept into his voice a note that made me wonder if he would not be glad to see the last of the old man.

"He will die if he ever runs for alderman," I grinned. "It would kill him to be beaten by the voters."

The captain smiled in spite of himself. I could see that everyone knew my old man was hipped on the alderman thing and nobody gave him a chance to win. You could see why that was too. The old man came from the docks and never was able to

shake off dock manners. How could he make a real speech?

"He is pretty strong, though," the captain said. "He might fool you and win." I only laughed and went back to talking about the job I wanted.

"I'll talk it over with him," he promised me again. "I'll do the best I can with him, and he has been feelin' fine for quite a while. Mebbe he will do something for us. But for the love of Mike, Jimmie, keep out of rackets for a while. Things are pretty bad around here now."

"I hear you're gettin' transferred?" I shot at him.

He set to drumming on the table with the fingers of his soft hand, and I knew he was worried. He always did that when he was worried, and I guess he was worried most of the time.

"There's some talk about it," he mumbled. "But I guess it won't come off. I don't want to leave here. Your old man is working on the thing for me. . . . I'll talk this job over with him and see if I can help you."

"Sure," I grinned; "he ought to do it for you. Look at the dough you bring him in every week!"

He raised his eyebrows and drummed louder, then he scowled. "A nice little friend you make!" he sneered. "I offer to help you and you make cracks like that!"

"I want the job," I told him. "Want it bad. See if you can't get it for me."

Then I left the station house, knowing very well that I had scared the captain a good deal and that he would tell the old man and maybe that would get me the job. I was right, too. I went to a movie that afternoon and got home just in time for dinner. We had a good cook and the old man was coming home to meals more. The food was great.

When I got home the captain was there and I heard him taking a drink with the old man. I went in where they were and I half expected to catch trouble right off the bat. But they both said they were glad I came in.

"We'll have three for dinner, captain," the old man cracked. "You stay along with us. Go telephone home and tell 'em where you are. I'll not have no for an answer."

The captain went to the telephone, and while he was gone the old man mixed three drinks. Just in the last few days he had started taking siphon water with his drinks and he had got some new glasses that were all frosted and very high.

"Bring some ice," he called to the maid; "an' see that it's cracked up in small pieces to fit a glass. Come, captain, we'll have a good whisky and soda before dinner."

Just as soon as he cracked that I knew he was in training for alderman. Not that aldermen drink these days, but this was the first time he had ever taken his liquor any way but straight, and up till

now our evening meal had always been called supper. I wondered if the old man was taking lessons in being a gentleman so he could stop the biggest kick against his being an alderman. If he was, I thought, he would get fooled in the end. Being a gentleman, I figure, is the same as Mary said about being reformed—it is on the inside.

But we drank the long drink out of the new glasses, and I could see the old man did not like the ice against his mustache, and before he had drunk all that water he was nearly drowned. I got a big laugh out of the idea. I liked to see him pay for all this nonsense just over running for alderman. I knew what it was all about, but I do not think the captain did. He did his best to swallow the highball.

"Nothin' like a whisky an' soda before dinner," the old man cracked. "I say good Scotch with fresh siphon makes a gentleman's drink."

When we got to the table there was more forks there than I ever saw before. I looked at the old man and he frowned. All through the meal things were served from platters, and we never did that before. We used to just reach out and help ourselves or pass things around. I never cracked a thing, but I could see that the old man was getting lots of fun out of watching the captain. Two or three times he almost tipped a platter out of the maid's hands, and he did not know any more about

the different forks than I did, or the old man himself did.

But, anyway, you get the idea that was taking the old man. We were beginning to put on some style, and as sure as you are born, that was only on account of the alderman thing. It might have been funny to think about, but there was another side that worried me.

If the old man ran for alderman and was beaten, that might ruin him for district committeeman too. Just as soon as he let it be seen that he could be licked, everyone would be out to lick him. I thought he was an awful fool to make the try, myself. I figured I would talk to him about that end of it when a good chance came along. Suppose he got licked for alderman and then for district committeeman too? Where would I be then?

"Jimmie," the captain was saying to me, "I have told your father about our talk."

"About the job, captain?" I asked. I sure hoped they had got together on the thing, and I felt from the way they acted that they had.

"About the job," he cracked back at me. "Yes, about the job. I think perhaps I have made your father see the sense of your idea."

"Good," I said. "But what about the job? Do I get one?"

"You do, I think." He raised his eyes to the old

man and received permission to speak out. "Yes, you get a job."

"A city job? What is it?"

"We are going to put you on the police department," he said as I nearly fell off the chair. "For a week or so you might have to do reserve duty at my station and after that we will see that you get into the C. I. D.—which means that you will be a detective."

He said something more, but I was so surprised I never did know what it was. Imagine me a cop! After all, maybe the old man would win for alderman. Anything could happen after this!

VIII

FOR a couple of minutes after the captain cracked that thing about making a dick out of me, I did not wise up to the idea. Of course, as soon as I could think at all, I saw through it. They knew I never would go on the force, because guys that remembered tricks I pulled with the old gang would take me for a stool and I would be picked up some night just like they picked up poor Fletch.

"You must think you are very smart, you two," I sneered at them as soon as I could speak. "There is about as much chance for me bein' a pavement pounder as there is of the old man bein' alderman!"

I figured I ought to have some comeback at them, and that looked like the best one handy. It sure worked. The old man choked on some food and stood up. I never saw a man so anxious to say something and swallow all in the same second. His face got red and then purple and his eyes bulged out like a frog's.

"Take it easy, old socks," I told him. "If you keep that up you'll soon be starin' at the bottoms of daisies!" The captain got up and ran around the table and hit the old man a shot on the back that

sounded like a bass drum. That cleared his throat and he was ready for action.

"You little rat!" he cracked at me. "That's just like you! You ask fer a job an' we get it for you. Then you pass out a line like that! We was goin' to put you on the police force because I told you before you ain't got brains enough to be any place where we can't watch you!"

"You ain't goin' to put me on any police force!" I hollered. "Not by a damned sight, you ain't! You may want me to go on it just so's I'll be bumped off as a stool, but I ain't goin' to fall for it, you bet."

The captain had gone around to his chair again, and now he cut in on the lingo by offering a sickly smile and what he thought were helpful ideas: "This is all a mistake," he cracked. "It is a misunderstandin' that you two can straighten out, but you'll never do it arguin' like that."

"Shut up!" the old man growled at him. "It ain't any of your business what my kid and I say!"

"I was only tryin' to help, chief?" the captain explained. "I come over here for a nice dinner, an' you sure gave it to me up till now."

"Eat, then, and shut up!" the old man growled again. "You," he said to me, "git out! I'll settle with you later on."

"Sure," I grunted. "Try to fill the captain up with bum forks and highballs. You can't eat with these new tools yourself an' you never drank any-

thing but rotgut whisky in your life, but if aldermen do it—go ahead! You don't know your real friends. If the captain wasn't afraid of you he'd tell you to lay off this crazy alderman thing. It'll break you all the way down if you try it."

He grabbed up a cup that was beside his plate and let it fly at me. I ducked and the cup shattered into a million pieces against the wall. I heard the old man curse like a pirate and I heard the new maid squawk with terror and beat it pell-mell for the kitchen.

But I oscared out of the house to give the old fool a chance to cool off. I was as mad as he was every time I thought about the deal they were trying to put over on me, but I knew too much to start throwing things, and that was more than you could say for him. I knew the captain would tell people about this dinner, and the telling never would help the old man any. Imagine a guy like that being alderman!

What speeches he would make! The first man that disagreed with him would be apt to spend the rest of the day identifying teeth as his own. My old man was as much a part of the docks as a steamboat. He would never change inside even if he did not work any more and drank highballs just to be fancy.

I went to the movies, and when I got home the captain and him were still sitting in the big room.

They were smoking and talking, and I heard the old man say again that he could beat any man in town for alderman. I was getting awful sick of that lingo. It was all he talked about, and I knew he was hipped on the idea, and when you get a guy like him with his mind made up, you have got something.

"I never ran away from a fight yet," he was saying, "an' whether the big boss likes it or not, I'm not goin' to start now. How did he git to be the big boss? By duckin' trouble? I guess not! He went out an' fought when he thought he was right an' could win. That's what I'm goin' to do."

"Of course," the captain told him, "I'll be for you. I'll vote for you an' I'll work for you, chief."

"But you think I'll get licked, eh?" the old man sneered.

"I don't know. Anybody that starts out to beat the machine is startin' on a long trip," the captain answered. I could see his real meaning, but the old man seemed blind. The captain felt the same way I did. The old man never could win, and once he was licked, the big boss, whoever he was, would be out to break him completely for kicking over the traces.

That would leave the district in the hands of new people, and maybe the captain would find himself in hot water unless he could square himself with the new gang. I was the same. If the old man

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JIMMY WILLIAMS, THE KID AND HIS GANG PULL ONE OF THEIR JOBS AND MAKE AN EASY GETAWAY.

fought and got licked I was licked too. Everybody would hate me and be after my scalp on account of the breaks I had while the old man was powerful.

I was so disgusted with the whole works that I never even waited to hear what else those two crooks would talk about. All the time, I can see now, I was getting lonelier and lonelier. With Mary up at the hospital and Danny worrying me about being trusted, I was alone.

That was the first night I had been to bed as early as that in a long time, and, funny as it seems, I went right to sleep. I remember it because it was the night before the big break between the old man and the big boss. The next day was the first time I ever saw the big boss.

The morning papers said that the old man was going to run for alderman and that his statement was nothing but a challenge to the biggest political powers in town. I suppose he had told them the night before, after talking with the captain. The telephone rang most of the day, and after a while the old man refused to answer it. What a mess!

He kept to himself all day, doing some pretty steady drinking, and pacing the floor a whole lot. He seemed to forget that him and I had a fight to settle, and I was glad to let it go at that. About four in the afternoon the big boss came to the house, and he met the old man in the hall while I was on the stairs and could hear what they said. I figured

he had probably been trying to reach us on the telephone and was sore because the old man would not answer.

He was a fine-looking man. He was dressed like a millionaire. Maybe he was one. He drove up the street in an automobile with a chauffeur, and the thing waited outside for him. You can tell a smart man just by his looks, and this man was smart. I thought of all the things he had done for me through the old man, and I have got to admit that I envied him a whole lot. What a cinch he had!

"Murphy," he cracked to the old man when they were sitting in the big room, "I've dropped down here to have you spike these rumors that you are going to fight Nolan for alderman in this ward."

"I didn't think you'd come to bring me flowers," the old man said. The minute I heard his voice I knew there was no chance of patching things up. He was a fighting fool, my old man. Get him started on anything that called for a fight and he would go ahead even if he knew he would lose.

"I have a statement here for you to sign," the big boss said steadily. I could hear paper rattle before the old man spoke again, then he said:

" A statement about what?"

"Merely stating that the papers are misinformed, and giving your hearty indorsement to Nolan."

I heard the old man's fist thump down on the table. "You an' the statement both can go to the

devil!" he cracked. "What do you think I made my statement for?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," the big boss said calmly. "It is, without doubt, the craziest thing I ever heard of a man doing! Either you are drunk or crazy, and it matters little which!"

"What's crazy about my bein' alderman?" the old man asked.

"We just don't want you, Murphy. . . . Lower your voice a little when you talk to me too. . . . Lower it more than a little."

I certainly thought there would be a grand scrap when he cracked that. He talked like he was speaking to a little boy that had got confused and was forgetting his manners. There must have been a full minute of absolute silence, and I could imagine my old man with his teeth chewing at his mustache and his big white hands working open and shut.

"I asked you," my father said at long last, "what's the matter with me fer alderman?"

"Well, I'll not stop to answer you in detail," the big boss sneered, "if you don't already know. But let's leave it that we see no sense in making a poor alderman out of a fairly good district committeeman. That explains it, don't you think?"

"Not to me," the old man snapped. "I'm out to go to the top, an' no matter what you think, I'm goin' to get there!"

"What a shame," this smooth guy laughs. "In-

deed, what a shame. I make it clear that we don't want you."

"What do I care whether you want me or not? Do you get everything you want?"

"I do in politics, Murphy!"

"You won't this time!"

That was the end, and I knew it then as well as I know it now. The second the old man cracked that, he declared war, and to declare war against as smart and as smooth a gent as the big boss was like signing up for ten rounds with a cannon.

"No. Perhaps you are right," the big boss said easily. "It may be that I will not get what I want this time. Because, you see, I really do not want to drive you out of politics. However, I see I have to do it. Sorry, Murphy."

I heard his chair slide back over the carpet and knew he was getting up to leave. I slipped back along the hall toward the stairs, but you can believe me, I was feeling pretty rotten. The old man was through. I would have bet my hat on that. No man could tangle with this classy-looking gent and come out with the long end of the stick. But the old man was fighting mad.

"Listen to me," he rasped, and I could picture him laying his big hand on the arm of the boss to keep him from leaving; "you go ahead and drive me outa the game. Go ahead. Remember, you're the one to crack that first. But get this: If

there's any drivin' done, you'll go! I'd like for you to have a drink on that. We've pulled together as friends, boss; now let's seal up the new deal with a drink. If it's war you want down here, it's war you'll get, an' you'll learn somethin' about fightin' before we're done with each other!"

"I'll drink with you, Murph," the big boss laughed in a hard voice. "Sure, I will. Pour the stuff."

Knowing the old man as I did, I expected he was planning some trick, but he did not pull it. I slipped back to the door again and heard him rattling glasses and a bottle. Then I heard the siphon bottle squirt, and the old man called in heavy tones for the girl to bring ice. It was almost like a show, this drinking to a fight to come. But the old man was that way.

"To a fight," he offered when the drinks were ready, "to the finish, boss! Your finish!"

"To more than that, Murph," the big boss laughed again, calling my old man by a nickname just like they were the best of pals. "I drink to Nolan for alderman and your political wake. Drink hearty!"

They must have gulped their drinks, because they caught me in the hall before I had a chance to get away.

"This," the big boss cracked when he saw me, "is your gorilla son, isn't it?"

"He's the promisin' child of Alderman Murphy, boss," the old man sneers. "An' the little rat can promise more things in a minute than you could think up in a month."

"I'll be making Clancy the district committeeman next year, Murph," the boss cracked through a smile. "That will give you plenty of time to rear this young prodigy."

With that he was gone, and the old man stood pretty still behind the door for a couple of seconds and watched the big boss go to his car. I heard the automobile motor start up, the horn sounded a warning and the machine glided away. I felt, somehow, just like I did that time Danny left me when I had been collared for bumping off that driver. Everything either me or the old man depended on went away in that big car. I knew it.

"I s'pose you heard it all, kid?" the old man asked me.

"I did," I grunted in disgust. "I never knew a guy as bullheaded as you are! You tried to bluff him, an' he'll sink you in the river before he winds up this fight!"

"You never knew a guy as game," my father corrected; and, at that, I had to kind of admire him. "He'll find out that Jim Murphy ain't nobody's —puppet!"

That was a new word he had found for speeches, and he had to stop and think how to use it. So I

knew again that he was getting all set to make this crazy fight.

"You heard what he said about Clancy?" I asked the old man.

"Bluff! Just bluff!"

"It is not. Even I got sense enough to see what his racket is there. Clancy controls a lot of votes around here, an' if the big boss promises him your job, it's a cinch Clancy won't be out workin' for you! You got to admit that you been dependin' on Clancy to fight for you."

The old man never answered, but he chewed his mustache and I knew I had hit him where it hurt. But his big jaw worked square and he walked past me with his fists opening and closing; and when I heard the rattle of glasses again and no sound of ice or siphon, I knew that he was acting like himself and the fight was all set.

If they brought the President of the United States into the district to fight against the old man they never would scare him off. I felt like a man on rubber ice, except that such a man has got a chance, if he keeps moving, and there was no way I could move.

That night, when we had what the old man was now calling "dinner," he was silent for most of the meal, but when we were about finished he got up and brought me one of his best cigars.

"Light up, kid," he said. "I want to talk with

you. All you can see in this fight of mine is me bein' licked. You're scared to death of that because you think we'll all be in the soup if I am."

"That's right," I agreed. "I want to tell you you'll never beat that bird that was here today."

"I'll do the talkin'," he grunted; "you listen. Have you stopped to think what'll happen if I win? Where will we be then? I'll stand out like a thumb that's stickin' square into the mayor's right eye! I'll be the only man that has beat the machine! Why don't I go to Clancy first an' tip him off that I'll make him committeeman when I get elected? How about that?"

"You are gettin' softenin' of the brain!" I snorted. "Do you think the big boss would have cracked that if he wasn't sure of Clancy already? All you would do that way would be to sit Clancy pretty and he would come out on top either way. With a fight on, he never would take sides."

"I said I'd do the talkin'!"

"I'll listen if you'll talk sense," I laughed.

"When I tell Clancy I'll make him the next committeeman he'll believe me. I'll beat the others to it. When they come to him I'll show him they just want to hang a double-cross on us both. That'll take their first big shot away from them; an' now I'm goin' to open a milk station fer the kids in the streets an' see what they can do to beat a guy like that. I'll give the milk away!

"That will make the women strong fer me an' they'll do a lot of talkin' to the men. Even if they don't vote, women are a big help, kid. After that, I'll start a lot of talk about bein' from the docks myself an' startin' a drive to git higher wages fer the men that are still there. That, I'll say, is why I want to be alderman. I'll tell the papers about weedin' out that gang an' cleanin' up this neighborhood fer the protection of women an' children an' merchants."

"But these bosses have got enough on you to send you to stir!" I snapped, trying my best to make him see what a fool play he was making.

"What bosses have got anythin' on me that I ain't got on them?" he bellowed. "I said you was a fool, kid! You are. All the things I've fixed up have been fixed through the very man that you saw today! That will never be brought up. Neither side can crack that stuff open, my bright young mutt. It's as bad on one side as the other! Anything they got on me, I got on them!"

He said a whole lot more, but most of it I did not pay much attention to. It was easy to see that he was ready for the fight and easy to see what a fight it would be. That was enough to set me half crazy. My old man was as good as licked, and that meant he was done politically, and with him out of politics I had about as much chance as an egg in a bull pen. But I could not make him see sense.

After he had shut up, I walked over to Clancy's. The minute I went in I knew things were different. Clancy just tossed his head at me instead of shaking hands. Danny Critch was there, and he walked over to me and bought a glass of beer, but even he was different. I knew right away the big boss already had Clancy primed for the fight. I bought another drink when we had finished the first, and Danny and me both lit up cigarettes.

"Where you been keepin' yourself, Jimmie?" he asked me when we leaned on the bar.

"Just kickin' around, Danny. I had a job for a while."

"I didn't know but what you was sore on me," he hinted.

"Me? I should say not! I just been takin' it easy."

"Picked up any soft dough?" he asked trying to talk as easy as we used to about such things.

"Not a quarter, Danny. I just been layin' low an' lettin' things break as they wanted to."

"How's the old man?"

"Fine the last I saw him—that was at supper."

"He ain't worried, is he?" Danny cracked, and his eyebrows raised in a way he had when he wanted you to know he knew more than you thought he did.

"I ain't noticed it," I said, speaking like nothing at all was on my mind.

"I was just wonderin'," Danny shrugged.

"There's a lot of talk about politics goin' the rounds."

Even though I knew my old man was wrong and was going to get the beating of his life, I had to stand by him. That is a very funny thing. If you asked me whether I liked him, I would say no. He was nothing to me and I never would trust him, but when anybody else panned him it always made me sore.

"I guess if it's goin' the rounds the old man started it himself," I grinned. "He certainly knows the politics racket, Danny, an' there's nobody got better evidence of that than you!"

"They're talkin' about a new deal all around," Danny went on, his voice dropping like he wanted only me to hear what he said. "Clancy gets a mention every little while." I knew then that Clancy had put Danny up to pumping me for any information I might have, even though Danny was trying to make me think he did not want Clancy to know we were talking. Then I was sure Danny would cross me. Even with all my suspicions about how he had played with the gang, I could hardly believe it.

"Yeah?" I grinned. "Well, what difference would it make if Clancy got a good break? He's our friend, ain't he?"

I think Danny got wise that I was kidding him, and he drank up his beer at one gulp, trying to

think of the next thing he would say. I lost all faith in Danny that day. I just stood there and hoped he would say enough so that I could find out what he really wanted to know.

"Sure, he is!" he said after he had wiped off his mouth. "Hey, Tommy, give us another here, will yuh? . . . I was only thinkin', Jimmie," he went on, turning back to me, "that mebbe, if things did break sour, you an' me might be in fer a tough rap."

"I ain't worryin'," I grunted. "Whatever the old man does will work out all right. You know that. Look at the deals he has pulled! Who is there around here to beat him?"

Danny almost fell for that by cracking what was on his mind, but he just agreed with me at last. I knew from the way he stumbled for words that the big boss had already cut in with Clancy and the old man was licked sure as fate. It set me to thinking a whole lot, and when Lefty Todd telephoned me that night and asked me to meet him, I went along, because I was sure the whole bunch were getting stirred up over the fight the old man was going to make.

When I started telling this story, I promised you, and myself too, that I would stick to things as they happened, but that is pretty hard to do. You remember that I told you the assistant district attorney who was Lefty's pal had been broke, kicked out? The old man told me he had arranged that,

you remember. I should have made that clear when I first mentioned it, but I knew nothing about how it happened until this night after I left Clancy's and went to meet Lefty. I had just heard that he was out and the old man said he had him fired.

Now I found the real story from Lefty, so it is hard to keep things in too good order as I tell them. During the trial of the old gang I had to keep away from Lefty, as I said, and I would not have gone to him now but for the desire to see what he knew about the big fight between the big boss and my old man. Lefty went to the very place that we had shot up, and nobody seemed sore on me. We sat at a table and ate a couple of sandwiches with our beer.

"You said you and your old man didn't hit it off very good," Lefty said when we started to talk business.

"I said the truth," I encouraged him.

"He's a gone coon, your old man," Lefty grinned. "He won't have pull enough to drag a good thief out of the choir when the next election is over."

"Yeah? I hadn't heard much about it," I grunted again, "an' I don't care a hoot whether he does or not."

"He's jammin' up with the big boss, the fool!" Lefty went on. "It ain't a question of beatin' him at the polls, Jimmie. It's a question of just how to do it."

"I guess he ain't goin' to be very easy to beat."

"They'll beat him! Don't fret over that. I'm only tryin' to keep you out of the mess. You and I can pull some soft gelt off'n the pile if we can work right. We had it all set last time, till your old man got scared and fired the assistant district attorney."

"Yeah," I lied, "I knew about that, but I couldn't do anything."

"He threw him out by tellin' the district attorney that we were tryin' to get somethin' on him. . . . A smart mug, at that, your old man. What ever steamed him up over this fool play for alderman?"

"He got big ideas, I guess."

"He'll get littler ones," Lefty scowled. "They are out to beat him, an' they'll do it sure. But what I want to talk to you about is helpin' us a little."

"Helpin' you beat my old man?" I cracked.

"Sure! It's that or take the rap with him!"

"Meanin' what, Lefty?"

"Well, a lot of guys know plenty about you. It's a cinch you can't work unless the mob protects you, an' they'll never do that unless you play with them now."

"Nobody can send me away," I said, getting pretty sore for a minute. "I know enough about all the bosses to keep me safe."

"You're talkin' sucker talk now! Nobody's goin' to do any talkin', but my pal that was fired is goin'

to stage a sweet come-back when your old man is licked. He knows it an' he's ready to buy half the votes in your district. The big boss has staged a play that brings Clancy an' my pal into the same boat. Clancy buys the votes with my pal's dough, an' for that he gets the job your old man has got now, after Nolan wins for alderman."

"You sure got things arranged," I laughed uneasily.

"They can't miss, Jimmie. You know that. If that was all there was to it, it would be a cinch. But your old man is a fighter. If he's got the nerve to bust up the organization like he did, he's got the nerve to fight to the last ditch. That's what is eatin' into the skulls of the mob. How far will he go?"

"How far can he go?" I cracks.

"Not very far if he starts talkin', but he might make the organization look bad for a while."

"I don't know what his plans are," I grunted, "but he's mighty strong down there."

"He'll never even git his stuff into the papers," Lefty grinned. "What he gets across to the voters he'll have to write to them, or say in speeches. The mob has stopped the papers on him."

"Yeah? What do you want me to do to help you?"

"Meet my pal an' me here tomorrow night, kid," he said. "By that time we'll have the plan all set

an' you can ride in high, wide an' han'some with the new bunch."

"I'll be here," I told Lefty; "what time?"

We arranged the date and I went home. The old man was in the big room and he was talking with Moriarity. I went in and they did not stop talking. I heard the old man proposition Moriarity by telling him that if he was elected alderman he would make Moriarity district committeeman. You should have seen the saloonkeeper squirm. He hated Clancy, but he was afraid that the old man would be licked.

"I'm just a business man, Mr. Murphy," he tried to beg off. "You see how 'tis. If I take soides wit' wan of yez, then the other wan moight win an' me business is ruint!"

The old man scared him to death, and poor Moriarity finally agreed to work for him. But I could see it was only fear, and when the other mob came after Moriarity, fear would rule him again, and he was no good to anybody. He would be one thing one day and another the next.

When he had gone I went to the buffet for a drink, and the old man came over and had one too. His eyes were heavy and he looked worried and tired, and somehow I felt sorry that it was all over for him. I was dead sure he was licked.

"I had a proposition tonight," I told him.

"From who? What for?" he asked, and his voice sounded as tired as his eyes looked.

"You are bound to get licked," I said steadily. Then I raised my glass to him and tossed off the drink. "Bound to get licked. So they gave me a chance to get out from under the crash."

"What kind of a chance?" he asked steadily.

"To help lick you," I cracked. "They said that would put me in with the new mob."

He drank his drink and started chewing his mustache like there might have been just a little more of the liquor left there and he needed and wanted it. After a minute he set his glass down on the buffet and looked at me in that straight way of his.

"It's my fight, kid," he said, his voice heavy; "it ain't yours. You do whatever you think is the right thing fer you to do."

"I'm goin' to," I grunted. "You started the thing!"

He turned away a little, then changed his mind and swung back to the bottle and glasses and poured himself another shot. A sort of a funny smile crept around his mustache and he held the liquor up to the light again, like he always did when he was thinking or worried. I poured one because I had to be doing something. The poor old guy looked all worn out and it seemed like his back was against the wall and he was just beginning to see it.

"Yep," he said jerkily, "it's my fight. Mebbe I am licked, like you say—mebbe I am. But anyhow, I'll do some hefty fightin', kid, before I fall!

What did you do about this proposition? I know you got no brains, but which side are you on?"

I never knew just why I said it, but I guess I came as close to loving the old man that night as ever I did. I looked at him and then at his glass, still held up to the light, and it looked like a big red eye staring straight through me.

"I admit," I sneered, "that I got no brains—but I turned it down—turned it down cold. I'm with you. I'll take the fall on your side."

He laughed like he was pleased a lot, and then we clicked glasses and drank on it. It is funny how people do those things sometimes. I decided it all in a second—this fighting his fool play with him!

IX

LATER on, after I had beat it from town, I saw some pretty rough things and came mighty close to being bumped off, but I never saw hotter times than those days just before election rolled around. When the big boss set out to do a thing he did it. He was out to beat the old man, and three days before election I was sure he would do it if he had to have my father killed.

Nolan was a better speaker than the old man and he held mass meetings all over the ward. There was plenty of money back of him, and pull too. Even the mayor himself came down there and spoke in favor of Nolan. He said the city administration must be made up of men favorable to constructive programs, and Nolan was that man, whereas my old man would just make trouble and block progress. It was the first time a mayor ever had done that.

The papers were full of Nolan and never mentioned a thing the old man said. When my father opened his milk station and began giving away milk, they paid no attention to it at all; but after Nolan branded the thing a cheap political trick to attract

votes, the papers took up that cry and the milk station proved a boomerang.

I found out a lot about voters during those days. A lot of them are suckers, but once you let them get the idea you are kidding them you are as good as licked. They believed the old man had tried to kid them about higher wages and milk for the babies.

Nolan spoke at a hall not far from our house two days before election, and next day the papers told about how the old man's gangsters had raided the meeting and endangered the lives of the citizens in a vain attempt to murder Nolan himself.

That was a laugh, because I knew that Lefty Todd led that disturbance and fired a shot into the alley to make the story look good. He was for Nolan, and the trick kind of made a martyr out of the organization man. There were other things like that.

The papers told about attacks and ran cartoons of the old man with a smoking pistol in one hand and a milk bottle in the other. Under the picture he was called a psalm-singing, gun-toting hypocrite who took all voters for fair game and utter fools. You cannot please a man by trying to make a sucker of him and the voters got pretty sore on the old man.

It made me mighty hot to see the break they were giving him, and I went to Lefty and warned him to keep out of the district on election day. That

branded me fair enough and put me squarely in the old man's boat. Nobody knew who his friend was. The captain was trying to keep in the middle of the road as well as he could, but under it all he saw that the old man was licked, so he played with Nolan as much as he dared.

I tried to get some fellows together so that we could get voters out on election day and scare off any funny tricks from the uptown mob. I had a poor chance. Lefty Todd and his crew were all fixed to pack the polls and everybody knew they were tough, and shooters, and protected by the strong political mob. Clancy was handing out drinks and money like a drunken sailor, and I knew it was the old assistant district attorney who was footing the bills for it all. But what could we do? The police laughed at us and the papers printed nothing we said.

The old man was a wreck. His meetings were not very well attended, and when he did speak people laughed at him or the uptown gangs broke up the audience. He never was much with the king's English.

We had a lot of cards and signs made to put up around the ward, but as soon as we got them up they would be torn down. On one day alone I saw five men I knew were crooks from other parts of town and they were there only to make trouble and blame it on the old man. Stores were robbed and

stick-ups pulled off every day. The stick-ups were fakes, most of them; just done to make the old man look bad as the leader of the gas house district.

Danny Critch was working with Clancy and declared himself openly against the old man and me. I hated him for that. More than once the old man had saved Danny just because he was my pal. It seemed like I had no friends at all. Only twice did I see Mary, and she always talked just the same.

The old man was white as a ghost and his face was filled with wrinkles that seemed to come overnight. He knew a week before the vote was cast that he was licked, but he never quit fighting, and one time he jumped off a platform to wallop a man that had laughed at him. Of course, that about ruined him, because the papers said the victim was really but a boy and the old man had again shown his brutality and total unfitness for public trust.

I stuck to him as well as I could. We took a list of the voters and called on them all and said all we could say, but it did no good that I could see. The night before election a fake interview was printed in the papers and my old man was supposed to have admitted his defeat by Nolan and promised, as district committeeman, to aid the alderman all he could.

The very next issue told of a raid on a gambling house uptown and the amazing discovery that Jim

Murphy, who posed as a giver of milk, a raiser of wages and a prosecutor of criminals, was the real owner of the place.

I knew it was true, because the old man had boasted to me about breaking the assistant district attorney and taking over his gambling joint. All these things were making an impression on me that I hardly realize now. I was beginning to see what a poor chance a man has when he starts bucking against a current in politics.

On the morning of election day there were sixty strange policemen sent into the district and I knew that seven of them were no policemen at all! They were yeggs that had been put in uniform and sent around to vote a few times themselves and keep the old man's friends from voting. I know that sounds pretty raw, but it is the truth.

Word went around that gunmen who were Nolan's friends were packing the voting booths and ready to manhandle any Murphy voter. The result was that very few of the old man's friends went to the polls. Knowing what I did, I could not blame them.

At noon of election day I saw what was doing. It was as I had expected. The old man was licked to death. I had a feeling that he would be a laughing-stock shortly after the polls closed; the same sort of joke he had been when I was a child and people

laughed at me because I was "Jim Murphy's kid."

I got in a car and went to the hospital where Mary was. I had to see her, because I had made up my mind to beat it from town. After the old man had been licked like this and I had deliberately refused to play with Lefty Todd and the other gang, what chance did I have? I wanted to tell Mary and say good-by to her. She was mighty kind and sweet to me and I loved her more than ever when I saw her in uniform. She made a mighty sweet nurse, Mary did.

"Did your father win?" she asked me.

"Not a chance. He's beat a thousand miles, Mary. It means the end for him and, I guess, for me too. I'm goin' to beat it out of town an' see what I can pick up in a new place where I ain't known. I'm goin' to go straight, Mary; get me a good job an' stick to it, an' after a while I'll send fer you. Will you come?"

She only smiled and patted my hand and that same old look came over her face. I knew what she was thinking. I turned away from her mad.

"If you are really going away, Jimmie," she said to me, "at least kiss me good-by. I do love you. Love you more than you know, and I always will."

I kissed her and begged her to come along with me and help me out of the mess I had made of life, but even though she cried a lot, she stood pat on what she always said, and cracked that about giving

myself up again and confessing what I had done and taking the rap. Of course, I laughed that off and left her.

Then I went to the house. The old man was not there. He was out racing around in a hired car trying to get friends out to vote. I packed up my stuff and got it all ready for a quick jump from town. I had a couple of thousand dollars laid away in my room and I put that in my coat pocket.

But all of a sudden I hated to leave. There was not very much I could remember pleasantly about that house, yet I hated the idea of oscaring out of it for good. After all, it was home, and home kind of gets hold of a fellow.

By the time I was ready to make the jump the afternoon had passed pretty well along and I knew that the polls would close in a couple of hours. It made me boiling mad to think about the old man. I was willing not to see him after he learned how bad he was licked.

Just before leaving the house I went to the buffet again and fixed myself a drink. My mind was made up where I was going. It was quite a long way off, and since reading about the town I felt it was a pretty good place for smart guys. I had no idea of getting a steady job until I could pull one fast grab that would leave me on easy street, and that town seemed the place where the best chance would be.

While I was drinking, the old man came in. I'll never forget how he looked. He walked across the room and his feet dragged and his shoulders stooped. He looked like he had shrunk, if you can believe that. He never even noticed me. I stepped aside and he stood before the buffet and reached for the bottle. Right as I stood watching him, he drank five great big shots of raw liquor. Then he reeled around and staggered into his favorite chair. And at that, he was not drunk.

"Hello, kid," he said, and I never heard his voice so funny.

"They licked you," I cracked kind of slowly; "but what of it? You ain't layin' down like this just because you got a lickin', are you?"

"They ain't so sure they got me licked!" he croaked, his eyes looking strange and glassy and his big hands hanging almost to the floor. "I ain't such a bad worker myself when it comes to stuffin' a ballot box! That's what worried 'em, damn 'em! . . . Mebbe you better get a doctor. They shot me, kid—Clancy—that dirty rat!"

I got a doctor as quick as I could. The old man had been hit on the shoulder, they said, and must go to a hospital. I saw the ambulance come and take him away, and the last thing he asked for was a drink and one of his cigars.

"Better stay aroun' the house, kid," he cracked to

me when they carried him out. "You been workin' fer me an' they might take a shot at you."

The house seemed like a tomb when he was gone. The cook and the maid were as white as the old man had been, and they went around sniffing and sniveling and whispering between themselves. I saw no use of going along with the old man, so I was there alone with them. It was a tough spot.

Inside me there was a burning feeling that made me hate Danny Critch and Clancy. They were both double-crossers. The old man had said that Clancy shot him. I could see that he had pulled some trick on them all just at the last minute that might steal the election from under their noses, and Clancy, thinking of his own future if that happened, went for his rod and plugged the old man.

All of a sudden I made up my mind they would not get away with it. If I let them do that, what would everybody think of me? What would I think of myself? There was the old man's glass still wet on the buffet and I caught it up and took two swigs from it myself. That gave me nerve, and I went and got my gun and slipped it into my pocket.

The chances were that Clancy would be in his saloon talking with the gangs that had worked around the polls. He was the one I wanted, and every time I thought of the old man sitting in that chair, with his face all white and wrinkled and his

eyes glassy and his arms hanging low toward the floor, I hated Clancy.

The saloon was full of men. They were all excited and talking loud and expressing opinions. None of them gave the old man a chance to beat Nolan. Clancy was not back of the bar, but he stood outside, among the customers, and was talking big and buying a lot of drinks.

Every little while a car would roll up and lists would be shown and names of people that had not voted would be called out. Just as soon as that was done the car would be loaded with men from the saloon and rush away so that they could vote under those names and cast their vote for Nolan.

I waited near the door until Clancy saw me. A look of surprise came to his flushed face, then he grinned and winked.

"What's on your mind, Jimmie?" he asked. "Think we have the old man licked now?"

"You dirty rat!" I cracked back at him. "I think you are yellow, that's what I think! You shot the old man—he told me so himself! I just want you an' the rest of these drifters to know that nobody shoots a Murphy without hearin' about it."

"It's a lie!" Clancy shouted, but his face went white and I knew he was lying. "I haven't seen your old man since yesterday."

"Throw the little liar out!" somebody hollered, and three of them started toward me. I cannot tell

you now just how I happened to do the thing, but I guess I saw the old man's face again and knew that these crooks had robbed him and then tried to kill him.

Anyway, I yanked the rod and let fly at Clancy. I saw him kind of jump without moving his feet, if you know what I mean. He seem to jerk all over, then he swore and started pulling at a rod in his own coat. I got to the door and waved the gat I had, to keep everybody back. They were all yellow, and did not follow me.

I ran home, caught up my bag, took a couple more swigs from the old man's glass and beat it for the station. Nobody bothered me. I do not think there were any real cops in the district that day.

At the station I figured I better play the game safe. You know, the old man's protection was gone now. I was sure they had licked him at the polls, and the more I thought about it the more I felt that Clancy had shot him when he tried to work a trick to stuff the ballot boxes. That left me out in the cold, whether the old man died or whether he lived. Now that I had seen the big boss I knew how much sympathy was to be expected from him. Him and the old man had lifted their glasses together and drank to a fight. The fight was over and one of them had to be politically dead. The old man certainly was that, I thought, and for all I knew, he was physically dead too. At that, it might be better.

What would he do out of politics? There is nobody on earth common people love to kick like they do a fallen king, and the best idea of hell I ever got was the idea of my old man going back to the only thing he could do, which was push a truck. After his years of soft living I was not sure he could even do that any more.

So when I got to the station I went to the grilled window and asked what trains were leaving quick and going far. The guy back of the window looked at me like I was a loose nut.

"Where you goin', mister?" he cracked.

"Wherever you send me," I grinned. "I'm travelin' for my health an' I got to get started quick."

"But—well, I know, but—" He seemed to be chewing his tongue and trying to whistle at the same time he talked.

"What's the next fast train?" I cracked again. "Look at the room I'm givin' you to work in! North, south, east or west—all I want is a train!"

"There's a train for the South—Florida and all big points South—it leaves in"—he leaned toward me and looked through the screen at a big clock stuck on the station wall—"eighteen minutes." I could see he was nervous about me.

"There's a Pullman on that train named after me," I grinned. "Send me halfway to Florida."

"Richmond, Fredericksburg, Florence, Charleston, Savannah—" I swear he sounded like a soft-drink guy at the ball game.

"Any one of them," I cracked, flashing the bank roll so that he would have something to go on. He looked at me again, and finally snatched up a couple of yards of green paper and started pounding dates on it with a viciousness even worse than most of his kind seem to display.

"Charleston," he snapped, his eyes narrowed and his fingers trembling a bit; then he gave me the price and I paid him and took the ticket. While he was making change, I said:

"Some elections you birds run in this town! Did you vote today?"

"Yes, sir. But the real fight is down in the gas house district, where Murphy is fighting Nolan, and the machine too. He bit off more than he can chew, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you," I grunted. "I see they shot him——"

"Shot him!" the poor guy gasped. "I hadn't heard that!"

"It ain't in the papers yet, but it will be tonight."

"They ought to clean out that district," he said, his eyes narrower than ever, and looking me over suspiciously. . . . "Thirty-five, forty, fifty, seventy—just a second, sir." Then he switched a ten for

a twenty and I took up the change and walked over toward the track where the train was waiting for starting time.

As soon as I was out of sight I ducked over to a local window and bought a ticket for a town only fifty-odd miles away. I checked my bag and walked out of the station. The ticket for the South was pretty cheap insurance, I figured, if the boys wanted to trace me. That ticket seller never would forget me.

Two hours later I was rattling along in a day coach, with a flock of wops jabbering their lingo and digging into bags that were made of sheets, for bread that looked like it was made of iron and sounded like it was made of firecrackers. These day coaches are getting more and more like music boxes.

At the near-by town I bought a ticket and berth for the place I had in mind, and packed away a flock of eats while I was waiting for train time. I figured the mob back home would be too busy fighting over votes to start a chase for me, and I guess I was right.

The evening papers were out, and they showed the result of the votes in my home town, but only for the bigger jobs. The old man or Nolan never was mentioned, but I knew they would be in the morning.

That night I laid in the berth and did some tall

A William Fox Production. *Me-Gangster.*

MRS. WILLIAMS PLEADS WITH HER WAYWARD SON TO MEND HIS WAYS.

thinking for myself. Here I was alone and going to a strange town looking for a racket that would mean a sweet and a quick clean-up for me. There were some pretty clever and pretty tough gangs out where I was going, and, of course, I was more afraid of them than of the police.

I finally decided that the thing for me to do was lay low and keep my eyes open. In time I could meet guys and get acquainted and maybe get myself in right. There is always room for a guy that knows his stuff, and I figured that I knew the gang racket and was ready to step out and pull off a big job. That way I could get myself some ready dough and beat it out to the Coast, or somewhere, and just live the life of Reilly till Mary saw the light and came along with me. I did not want to stay crook, but I had to make one real clean-up before I could quit.

About ten o'clock the next morning I landed in town and did not even know the streets. I just walked around looking for the kind of a district that would look like home, and after a while I found it and located a little hotel that looked as though all it showed of its real self was the front wall that faced the street. I went in and asked for a place to flop. There was a kind of fat man behind a little desk, and his suit was all spotted and dirty, and never had been pressed, I guess, since he bought it. But he wore a swell diamond on his left hand and he gave me the right kind of a look when I went in.

I mean, when you know crooks you do not go wrong on them, and this bird, unless I was a newborn babe, was one of those cheap crooks that is afraid to do much himself but is able to keep his mouth shut, and on that account makes himself a living on what other guys do.

"I'm a stranger here," I cracked to him, "an' a pal told me, if I ever hit this burg, to give your joint a play."

"What pal?" he cracked, never making a move toward the dirty and wrinkled book they used for a register.

"Just a pal," I answered, winking a bit and shrugging my shoulders. "Is this one of them social-register joints? If it is, sweep it out and brush the dandruff off'n your shoulders!"

He swung the book around and kept giving me the once-over as I wrote a phony name on the register. I wrote David Smith and he slid a blotter over it so that it all blurred, and, after looking it all over, said, "How do you pronounce de name?"

"I dunno," I cracked. "I ain't very used to it myself."

After that I laughed and he kind of grinned. I tossed him five bucks and he whistled to a crummy-looking bird that was resting on the handle of a mop. The joint was a walk-up and they put me on the third-floor front.

When we got to the room the porter shook his

head like life had been unkind to him, but he got different ideas when I slipped him a buck and told him to bring me a paper and keep the change.

When he brought me the paper I saw enough in one headline to let me know that the day of the Murphys had blown up and hereafter a Smith had all the breaks. The old man had been snowed under for alderman. Nolan beat him fifteen to one and the organization had swept the town as well. I felt sorry for the old boy as I read that. It mentioned his downfall like the whole thing was a great joke. They made a monkey of him; called him a jackass for trying to fight the system. As a reformer and a free-milk distributor and a wage raiser, the old man was a bust. Anybody could see that. Good-by, Jim Murphy! The papers said one of his own disappointed henchmen had shot him. He was going to live, it said, and he refused to open his mouth about his defeat or about who shot him or about anything else.

I was glad the paper did not mention me at all. Now I was David Smith, and unless I was all wrong, that greasy mug down by the register was going to steer me where I wanted to go. I figured I could play him for all he knew, if I got half a chance. That was what I decided to do.

X

I SUPPOSE that what is most interesting to everybody is the actual way we pulled off jobs, and if you are going to write this I ought to stick more to that and make things more exciting than they really happened. But I cannot do that very well. I see these things in the way they affected me and the way they worked out from my own angle, so all I can do is tell just exactly what I remember, and then you tell the truth and let me read it when it is finished.

That is why I tell you about the fat guy with the crummy suit and the big diamond. He was the bird I decided to make a play for, even though I knew he was not very smart and not a big guy. I mean, if you want to meet the president you first have got to make the grade through some chump in a uniform and then work your way up.

So later on I had quite a little talk with him. I went out for some chow and he was still behind the little desk, leaning back in one of those chairs that you see a lot around fire houses. He had a hand-made cigarette between his fingers, but he was too sleepy to do much smoking. I knew the cigarette

was hand made, because half of the tobacco still clung to this guy's coat and vest. But he woke up when he saw me. I breezed over and leaned on the little desk and grinned at him.

"I always wanted to run a dump like this," I cracked; "and since seein' you I got the fever worse'n ever."

"You're full uh quips, ain't you?" he half sneered. But he let his feet drop off the dial of a little safe that stood against the wall, and when they landed on the floor he shook just like jelly when somebody bumps against the edge of the table.

"I don't mean to be fresh, skipper," I cracked. "I'm only tryin' to be friendly. You look like you, an' mebbe three other birds, own this whole town an' the responsibility don't worry you a bit."

"Nothin' worries me," he answered, his fat cheeks wrinkling a bit more as his eyes squinted up at me. I could see he was suspicious of me, and I guessed it was because he would have been the same toward anybody that just came in off the street without any tip-off on themselves.

"Sure it does," I grinned at him. "I worry you."

His eyes narrowed again and he puffed his cheeks and lifted his fat hand so that he could get at his cigarette. The thing was out and he fumbled for a match. When he lit it the dead ashes on the end of the cigarette lined up in the parade of forgotten things along the front of his vest.

He puffed like a leaky engine and pretty soon his head looked like a big, pale pumpkin that was floating on an ocean of smoke. All during these movements he was sizing me up plenty, and that made me glad, because I could see that he had something to hide. Whenever a man is suspicious of you he is afraid of you, and if he is afraid of you when he does not even know you, it must be because of something he has done himself. Then you know he is a crook.

"You're kiddin' yerself dizzy," he wheezed after a minute. "Why should I be leary of you?"

"Mebbe I'm a dick," I grinned; "or mebbe even a gunman come here to rob this joint! I see you keep the safe out in the open where a yegg can get a crack at it!"

That was a joke, because there was a sign hanging on the little sardine can which read: DON'T BOTHER. IT'S NEVER LOCKED. He grinned, but it was a queer grin.

"There's a sight better chance of my crackin' the crib than there is of my bein' a dick, pal," I said. "I come here for a nice, quiet rest, an' I'd like to talk it all over with you."

"There's nothin' in the place that'll bother yuh," he grunted, returning again to his slow-burning and quick-dying cigarette; "rest yer head off!"

"How about a little drink?" I asked him.

"We ain't got no bar here an' I can't go out."

I glanced down at the dirty register, with its dog ears on the corners, and saw that my own new and blurred name was the last entry. Business in this flop house was none too good.

"Pretty busy, huh?" I laughed. Then I lit a smoke, too, and whether he liked it or not I sat on the edge of the desk and looked down at him. "Tell me somethin' about the town, buddy," I asked. "I don't know one end from the other."

"You done well tuh find us here," he growled, "not knowin' the burg at all."

"A pal told me just how to get here."

He sneered at me: "Yer pal dead, is he?" he cracked, and I knew he did not believe I had been sent to the place.

"Uh-huh," I said; "he's dead for seven to ten years, but I'm figgerin' on about five or six, because he certainly knows how to do time."

His fat face twisted a little and his eyes closed to narrow slits again. He looked at me for a long time, then said, "You talk too much, kid."

Before I could answer, the dreamy porter showed up again. It looked to me like he was using the same mop for a crutch. The fat guy saw him and looked at his watch, then back at me.

"There's a joint three doors down the street," he said. "I could have that drink wit' yuh now. Slumber, there"—sweeping a fat hand toward the lazy porter—"kin look after the joint."

When he waddled out of that chair it looked like he got up by stages, like two elevators going in opposite directions. While his bones were going up his flesh was sagging down. He threw away his half-smoked cigarette before we got to the door, and before we got through it he had a bag of tobacco and papers out and was rolling another one. His big fat fingers were clever, at that. I figured I would make him talk before long, and when I did I would learn a thing or two that fitted into my plans. We found a pretty dirty barroom three doors away from my new home and the fat guy led me in there.

"You know my name's Smith," I grinned at him as we went in, "but I ain't got any idea what yours is."

"Skinny," he cracked; "just call me Skinny." I mean that was a laugh; he must have weighed two-thirty.

"Great, Slim," I grinned; "you'll feel better after we get a powder or two in this joint."

The bartender was a tough-looking mug, and he came up to us with his eyes on Skinny and his mind on me.

"What'll yuh have, gents?" he asked.

"Same thing," Skinny said; then he turned his fat face toward me and said, "I dunno what Smith'll have."

"The best you got, old pal," I grinned, "an' git aboard yourself."

The bartender nodded and set up a bottle with three glasses spread around it. The glasses were about half an inch thick and it looked like you were getting a big slug, but when you drank it you knew different.

"Ging' ale or water?" the bartender asked, his eyes still on Skinny. I knew they were trying to pass some sign between them, and that tickled me to death. I felt I could get in right through this bunch if I was smart enough to learn something about them. Of course, they might be dock thieves or automobile thieves, or even just dips and second-story men, but anyhow it was a contact in a new town, and if I could get them to talking I knew I would learn what I wanted to know.

"Why spoil good liquor," I asked, "with ginger ale or water?" But I kept my eye right on Skinny and knew that he could not flash a sign without my knowing it. I never will forget that drink. Those two birds were not very smart, but they were very worried. I had told Skinny enough to let him think I was a crook, but he knew that a copper might do the same thing. He was scared a bit, and the bartender knew it, but as long as I kept close watch on them they could not do anything about it.

I poured us all a drink and threw a five-dollar bill on the bar. "We might as well knock off the bottle," I said. "I'm a stranger in town, with nothin' but

time, an' I rather do it here than lots of other places."

Skinny gave me a dirty look, and I laughed at him and said: "All right. I'll turn around and you can tip this lad's mitt that you don't know me from a ton of coal."

I turned my back on them and after a couple of seconds I asked if it was all right to turn back again. The bartender seemed puzzled and a little sore.

"I don't get you at all, Smith," he said kind of hotly. "What's the big idea?"

"You," Skinny grunted, his eyes slits and his fat cheeks all wrinkled up again, "are either the dumbest or the smartest guy aroun' here."

"I'm dumb," I laughed. "Drink up again. If things break pretty good for a guy, can't he even make a couple of new pals an' spread himself?"

"What's your racket?" the bartender asked, straight from the shoulder.

"Stick-ups," I snapped, "an' I'm good at 'em! When you birds snap out of it we can collect some easy pickin' fer ourselves."

That knocked them flat. They looked at each other and both of them gulped down their drinks. I admit the game looked too open to be on the level, but after all, if they had me collared for what I said, nobody could prove a thing, and I was pretty sure they would not have me collared; pretty sure I had

them sized up right. In a new burg you have to take some chances like that.

"Somebody will put the slug on you if you crack that lingo," the bartender said at last. "Why don't you git yourself a hand organ to go with it? More guys would hear you that way!"

He flashed another look at Skinny and I could see that he was doubtful of me. That suited me fine. I could see that Skinny's whole idea in bringing me here was to have this guy look me over, and if there is anything I do not look like it is a cop.

Figuring to sew up the whole plant, I said, "I know you birds don't know me, but I'm on the loop from a long ways off an' I'm anxious to make a couple of good smart friends that are game. I've heard this burg was full of 'em."

"It is," Skinny answered, "an' you may find that out."

"Just what I want. I'm a little game myself ——"

Just then another man came into the saloon and he nodded to Skinny and the bartender. The minute I lamped him I made him for a dick. You never miss on those birds. He stood down a little from us and the bartender knew what he wanted and served him without any order, so I knew this was a hangout of his. That was a good sign too.

After a while the bartender and the dick got to

talking very low. I took another drink and so did Skinny. After that I asked, "Who's the dick, Skinny? Reg'lar, ain't he?"

"I dunno," Skinny mumbled. "He is——"

"He's reg'lar, all right," I snapped. "If he wasn't he never would have all that to say to this bartendin' bozo."

"You know enough to find out a lot, mebbe," Skinny threatened, but I only laughed. I figured we were making very good headway, but the more I saw of Skinny the less I thought he would ever be in on any big deals. I mean no guy without some brains is ever very good or ever very bad. Skinny's brains were all trapped in fat and could not work. What I wanted was to get him talking.

Any time you can sit around and hear people talk about other people in something of the same line of business, you learn things. The best way I ever found to get a line on a big man is to get a little man talking about him.

That was what I had in mind with Skinny. If I could get him talking about crimes he knew nothing about I would soon hear who the big mugs were and where they might be found. Then I would oscar away from Skinny and have a line of conversation to spring on the people I really wanted to meet.

The dick took a second drink and walked out, of course without paying for anything. The bartender

came back to us and I kind of thought from the look on his face that he might have been telling the dick about me.

"Well," I said, "there's still a couple more rounds in this bottle and we might as well finish it up." We did.

On the way back to the little hotel I saw the dick giving me the once-over, and that made me sure that the bartender had cracked something about me and that I would be watched. What the dick probably was trying to find out was whether I was a cop or really on the level.

That night I had a pretty good meal at a restaurant near Skinny's place, but it was no good compared to the meals the old man used to serve. I could not help but be blue. To think of the old man throwing all that away just because he thought he wanted to be a smart guy and drink highballs, and be an alderman.

There was Mary too. I thought of her in her uniform, with that satisfied and determined look on her face, and I wondered what she was thinking of me. I supposed the papers had carried the story about my taking a shot at Clancy and I guessed that Mary would think that pretty awful. I could not write to her and tell her why I had done it, because the cops would be watching for that, and Clancy would like nothing better than to see me collared right.

I read the papers, but it was quite a while before I found out much about the elections at home. The old man was mentioned and it said that his wound was not serious and doctors thought he could go home in a week. Home! That place would never be home to him again!

All the neighbors would be giving him the laugh, and anyway, it cost a lot of money to run that house. I wondered what the old man was going to do. He was a terrible fighter. He might even try to pull off a big haul and get caught cold. That would finish him right.

He refused to talk about his wound, according to the paper, and said he had no idea who shot him. Right in the same article I found a few lines that told me how hard Clancy had been hit, and I was glad when I saw it was nothing but a scrape on the arm and not serious.

The paper said there was something between the two shootings that convinced the police that they came from the same source and then, right in the same breath, so to speak, they announced that I had disappeared. It made it look bad for me.

You know, I never had been away from home before and loneliness hit me hard. I did not miss anything in particular, I just missed everything. Even the sound of the trolley cars was different, and the streets were filled with traffic that was run different than I was used to. The street lights glowed

about the same, but they were different shapes, and there was not a familiar thing in sight. Maybe I got a little homesick.

But I stuck it out, and after about two weeks that dick let go of my trail and Skinny's face did not always twist up in suspicion when he saw me, and down at the dirty saloon I was able to talk frankly with the bartender and he used to show signs of friendliness. After that I met guys, but they always kept a close mouth.

There was a pool table in the back of the saloon and I used to sit beside that a lot nights and watch different birds play pool. The balls sounded like putty, the cues were crooked and the green cloth was patched with black court-plaster in some places and just torn in others, but there were five or six guys that used to play there every night. They played for the drinks.

Sometimes when the game was close and somebody made a good shot or missed an easy one, there would be a lot of laughing and shouting, and that gave me a chance to horn in on it and say a word or two. It is queer how quick a man will get used to seeing another man around and all of a sudden think he is a friend. That was what I was depending on to get me in.

Pretty nearly a month passed before anything big broke. Then it came with a rush. The morning papers told about a gang that had stuck up a

bank wagon and oscared with forty thousand dollars in ready money and about three times that much in securities. It was the very kind of thing that had brought me to the town, and the gang that pulled this job was exactly the gang I wanted to reach. They knew their stuff. Of course, between the lines, I could read a lot more than just what the papers said about the crime. For instance, when they said that the bandits carried machine guns and swept the streets with bullets, I knew that the gang was smart.

The minute anybody cracked one of these new machine guns they had everything their own way. Shooting one of those things is just like turning a fire hose on a crowd. You cannot miss. Give a gangster a machine gun and he will mow down twenty men with gats before they even get their rod out. The cops know that, too, and they would be fools to forget it.

Carrying the gun was smart, but the way they handled it was even smarter. The papers said it was a miracle that nobody was shot down as the bandits sent a hail of lead through crowded streets. It was easy to see that these birds let the machine gun kick up so it shot over the heads of people and just sent them oscaring for a safe place, cops and all. You know, it is almost impossible to hold one of those guns on a level when it is working on automatic. The recoil kicks it right up in the air.

The whole stick-up only took eight minutes, and

by the time the police riot gang was around the deal was over and the hand played. That meant it was a protected job too. You know, nobody can beat the patrol system that much, unless the system is jimmied up to help them.

More stick-up guys are caught through crooks than through the police. Let a stranger go after a stick-up job and every crook in town gets sore and gives out tips that lead right to him. The dicks get the truth on jobs that regular workers pull off and then shy off on account of protection. But when a new guy shows and tries to pull one, he has both the dicks and the gang to beat. It cannot be done.

The gang is political and criminal both, and they know everybody in the district. Somebody is bound to get a flash at a holdup man, and unless he is protected he is about as safe as a drunk sliding down the Washington Monument in a high wind.

This gang had worked with a car and they carried the machine gun on the back seat. Just as soon as the bank wagon showed they blazed away with the gun and everything came their way. Anybody that fools around much in front of these new machine guns is a sap.

The gang was smart, the papers said, because they left no clews. That is a laugh. Where are you going to get an automobile without leaving a clew? If you steal it, the owner knows where it was stolen from and they trace you from there. If you use

phony numbers there is still the make of the car, and unless you are protected some of the gang, or just ordinary people, are sure to remember it! If not, how did the papers know the machine gun was carried on the back seat? Anybody close enough to hear the gun was close enough to see something, and anybody seeing something has a good clew, if the coppers will really work on it.

Also, how are you going to get rid of the bus after the stickup? How about finger prints and all that? Sometime take your own car and see what a chance you have got of driving through town with nobody knowing it. Just plain driving, I mean. You cannot do it even without the stick-up or the machine gun. No. This was the gang I wanted all right, or they would have been collared two hours after the job had been pulled.

So I went right to the saloon and got my break. The bartender and Skinny and all the pool players were talking about the holdup, and that proved they had nothing to do with it first hand. I had hardly got myself a drink when the well-known dick that had followed me blew in. He had a drink and then walked up to me.

"Hello," he cracked; "quite a job they pulled yesterday afternoon, eh?"

"I'll say it was," I answered, noticing that his right hand was inside his coat pocket. "A peach. But you can keep the rod stowed away," I grinned,

glancing at his pocket, "because I don't know nothin' about it!"

"You been around here quite a while," he said sourly, "and nobody has caught you doin' no work."

"Nobody will," I grunted. "I work in the dark. Mebbe you can git a name for yourself by runnin' me in for this big job, but you know damned well your play won't last long."

"We got orders to pick up all strangers," he said, his voice only half-hearted.

"I ain't a stranger. You just said I been here quite a while. And anyhow, nobody knows better than you that no strangers pulled this one!"

He looked at me with a queer light in his eye and a sort of smirk about his mouth. "I can't quite make you," he said. "You seem to be smart——"

"You admit you ain't caught me workin'," I grinned, "an' it only took you a couple of weeks to find out I wasn't a dick!"

That one stopped him. What could I be but a crook? It showed him that I knew all the time he was following me and that he wanted to know whether I was a copper or not. He was more worried about that than he was about my being a crook. He raised his eyebrows and his lips worked in and out kind of fast.

"I guess you don't know nothin' about this job. You certainly ain't been hangin' out with a gang," he said lamely.

"Righto, kid," I cracked, "an' now that we are friends, have a little drink with me."

"I don't mind if I do. . . . Whisky, Rift." I never knew what the bartender's real name was, but everybody called him that: Rift.

"You almost got to hand it to a gang like that," I said when we had tipped our glasses. "They knew their stuff, an' just when, an' how, to pull it off."

He grunted sourly and nodded.

"These new machine guns," I went along, "are the hottest things ever, ain't they? I know that you birds have been tipped off on them an' you must know somethin' about the kind of a gang that could do such a job."

Seeing that we were talking pretty friendly, one of the pool players came along and bought a drink.

"It's the South-End gang," he said, and there was a certain amount of envy in his voice. "They get away with murder—and you know why!" He winked at the dick and they both grinned a little.

I had been reading the papers a good deal and I always made it my business to read the political news carefully. Every old paper I could get hold of helped me to find out what had been going on in the past few months, and there are always a lot of old newspapers around a joint like Skinny's.

I knew the names of the mayor and the council-

men and six or seven of the aldermen and also the names of the political bosses that were mentioned from time to time. One of the aldermen from the South End was named Glench, so when this bird cracked about the South End I spoke Glench's name.

"This man Glench looks like a live one," I said casually. Right away the dick straightened like he had stepped on something hot, but the pool player laughed right out loud and leaned over and gave me a friendly push on the shoulder.

"You win!" he laughed. "Another drink on me. I don't know who you are or where you came from, but you win!"

I knew right away I had made a bull's-eye. Gangsters talk a lot among themselves and you can always tell when you crack a name that means a whole lot. Glench, I knew, was one of those birds that sits back and collects and sees that policemen are where he wants them when jobs are pulled.

There are a whole lot of square coppers, and do not think there are not. But many a cop who is on the level has answered a bum order to be in a certain spot at a certain time and then found out that, at the same time, a sweet job has been pulled at some other point on his beat.

Glench ran a big saloon and a fight club and a gambling house down in the South End. That was well known and nobody seemed to hold it much

against him. He had the knack of keeping his name in print, and it was always in connection with some humane reform.

You know, after what I have seen of politicians, I figure I could have saved a lot of time in that town by picking out the biggest reform guy and going straight to him. I have learned, when a man hollers about how good he is, and how square and honest, to buckle up the money belt mighty fast.

Well, after the pool player pulled his line I knew just where I had to make my contact, and I felt pretty about it. I bought a couple of more drinks and finally got the dick to talking a bit. I learned that Glench was a smart worker and that he ran the South End from stem to stern.

"That's a tough neighborhood, that South End," the dick assured me. "I used to walk a beat down there an' there's been many a night when only good sense kept me from bein' bumped. Take guys like Mickey Flenk an' Grapes Quant an' Snift Weller—those birds are in the game for real dough, an' they get it. A guy that would try to cut in on them would be nutty as a soused chickadee!" I thought maybe he had wised up to my idea and was tipping me off to keep clear of the South End.

We stayed at Rift's place till dark, and after that I set out to locate some of the guys they had named. One of the names I had seen in the papers, and that

was Snift Weller. He ran a saloon down in the South End, too, and after what the dick had cracked I knew he stood in with the political mob.

In one of the old newspapers I had read about a bird named Flop Gannon who had pulled some big jobs and had to beat it. I decided to take a chance on using his name. It never could do me any harm, because if he was enemies with the bunch I met I would explain I just knew him by chance and did not know much about him.

So that night I located Snift's place. It was a big place with a brass rail fifty feet long and mirrors that never showed a speck all the time I hung around the dump. They had four porters and three bartenders going all the time. Down at the end of the bar was a big free lunch, and most of the guys coming in were just suckers that worked for a living.

But every little while I would spot somebody smart, and once I saw a chump made in Snift's place and knew that Snift was wise. When they make a chump it means that they frame him on some smart racket and clean him out of his dough. Snift saw the guys working on this one, and so I knew Snift could be talked to. After I had been playing the joint for a week or two I went up to him to get better acquainted.

"Could I see you alone, Snift?" I cracked. "I'm flush an' not lookin' fer a touch——"

"Sure thing!" he cracked. He was always that way. He had a smile a mile wide, and it looked bigger because there were two gold teeth in his mouth, one on each side, and that seemed to make him shine every time he grinned. He led me into a little sort of office near the end of the bar and we sat down at a desk.

"I'll make it snappy, Snift," I opened up, "an' tell you that I'm reg'lar an' a bit strange in town. I got told about three months ago that you was a swell guy an' if I ever hit this burg to get in touch with you. I pulled a little prowl with the guy that told me an' he shot square with me, no matter what he might 'a done here before I knew him. He may be your friend or your enemy, but he told me you was a straight shooter."

"Who the hell you talkin' about?" Snift demanded.

"Flop Gannon," I said, and right away his face lit up and he glanced up quick to see if there might be anybody around listening. I knew I had guessed right. Flop was a friend of his. But instead of asking me something about Flop, which I would have answered by saying that my buddy must have taken Flop's name if I got showed up, Snift says:

"Yeah? Flop's doin' time on the Coast. Got a three stretch under the name of Abrahams—we had to stop identification here so's he could—what did you say your name was, pardner?"

"The one I'm usin' now is Smith," I cracked. "Dave Smith. I'm kind of hidin' away, Snift, an' lookin' fer a break to come my way."

It is funny how easy a man will tip his mitt when he is sure you are on the bend in his corner. Snift looked at me for a couple of seconds, then he grinned, and I knew I was in. "Things break pretty fast around here when they break, kid," he said.

"That bank wagon was the slickest job I ever heard of, Snift," I cracked. "I ain't sayin', or thinkin', you know anythin' about it, but from what Flop tipped me off, I figger that's the kind of a job you might put me in on."

"You needn't be scared, kid," Snift laughed. "We pulled off that job an' we'll pull off some more like it. The thing is to prove we did!"

I guess I looked surprised at the way he talked so open about it all, but he settled it for me in a second. He laughed again and his teeth shimmered like little lights. Then he laid a big hand on my knee and squeezed it and said:

"You're the kid that's been hangin' around Rift's place tryin' to make a connection." He was still smiling that mile-wide smile and ready to say more, so I just nodded. I guess that was all I could have done anyway, I was so surprised.

"Good! Now come clean—what was your last racket—where are you from, an' what do you want?"

I told him. Told him everything from the old man down to the minute I shot Clancy, and then he told me that Clancy was hardly hit at all and if I wanted to work with them I would have to start hitting people hard when they began fishing for rods.

"When we shoot we hit hard," he grinned; "because you got to keep people in their places."

We had a drink on it and shook hands. "Here's luck, Jimmie," Snift cracked, still smiling, "but I guess it's just as well if I call you Dave."

"It is," I answered, "an' you can bet on me to go through, Snift."

"Your old man was a fool, Dave, but I'll take a chance on you just because of the way you took to get at me. You act reasonable careful."

"I try to be, Snift," I told him, "but you sure knocked me flat when you sprang that about Rift's joint."

"Don't make any mistake," he laughed at me. "We know every time a guy spits in this town! We have to. That dick that was followin' you has been my man since he was poundin' a beat aroun' here ten years ago. Rift an' Skinny are plants we put over there to find out what was goin' on when some birds tried to organize in that district. Say, did you ever meet Flop Gannon?"

"No," I grinned honestly.

"That helps," he grinned back; "because Flop

is upstairs now an' was one of the boys on the bank job. I'll have you meet him after a while. Stick around outside till I give you the high sign."

So I did that.

XI

I FELT so good over the way things had come my way that I went outside in the saloon and took a couple of drinks. The way it looked to me was that gangs could work easy enough so long as bosses kept out of fights between themselves. Snift and Grapes and Mickey, I guessed, all worked under Glench, and all of them made plenty. Maybe Glench owned all the saloons and they just ran them.

If Lefty Todd and Clancy and my old man and others like that had only had brains they would be making plenty and not taking many chances. When protection is right, there is nobody can reach you even if the evidence is bad against you. The trouble comes when gangs get to thinking they are being crossed and bosses think their end of the money is not big enough. That is what starts fighting and shooting each other, and when that starts nobody is safe.

I lit up a cigarette and hung around smoking it. While I smoked I was doing some steady thinking. Take Flop Gannon, for instance. Here he was right in town and pulling off snappy jobs like that

bank-wagon thing, and all the time the police of all big cities were supposed to be looking for him.

Here was a layout that nobody could beat. Snift was about as smooth as they came. I had found that out for myself. And now that I was in with them it looked like I might pull off one, or maybe two, quick jobs and get a real break. Then I would fade out of the picture and go to the Coast and find some way to get Mary out there, and that would make the hills just high enough, as the saying is.

About ten o'clock I saw Snift taking off his white coat. He always wore that white coat back of the bar, but he never did any bartending. He winked at me and jerked his head, and I went into the little office with him again.

"I will take you up to meet the gang," he grinned. "Flop will be glad to meet an old pal like you!"

We both laughed.

"I had to find some angle to git at you," I explained.

"You worked it out great. We been watchin' you do it fer quite a while, Dave." That was the last time he ever called me Dave. When we got upstairs the gang all called me "Kid," and that name stuck to me, and it always reminded me of the old man, and lots of times made me wonder what the old guy was doing and how they were breaking for him.

When Snift had put his coat on—I mean his street coat—he led me through another door that

opened off the back of his office, and we went upstairs. There was a door there and he opened it with a notched key. Back of the door there was a swell room. There was a table in the middle of it and several ash trays spread over it. Three nice lamps—as good as we had at home—stood around the room, and four or five deep leather chairs filled up corners and sides. The floor had a thick rug on it and in the entrance that led into another room there was a keg of beer with two big steins standing on top of it. It was just a well-furnished apartment.

"This here is where the boys hang out when they don't want to be kickin' around too much," Snift grinned. I could tell that he was proud of the place, so I played it up. I could do it honestly too. It was a sweet spot.

"Lots of times," Snift cracked, "there are guys that would put the slug on some of the boys if they got a chance, so we hide 'em away here till we git things fixed up."

I mean, this was real gang stuff. It was a business out in this town and they knew how to handle it. They were real pals that stuck together, and working that way a guy gets a break.

From that first room we went into another. It was as big as our big room at home and furnished even better. The table in the center looked like a billiard table and was covered with green cloth that had different gold lines on it. It was a gambling

table, and I knew they must have some pretty sweet crap games there when the gang had made a real good haul.

We walked across, Snift smiling all the while, and finally he took another key and unlocked a door, and as soon as he did I began to hear voices. He shoved me ahead of him, and after we walked through a little hall we came out into a sort of library where there were papers spread around and plenty of books if a guy felt like reading.

Five men were sitting at a little table playing poker, and when we went in three of them got up and stretched.

"Hi, Snift," one of them cracked, "what's the news?"

"Got a guy that is a great pal of Flop's here," Snift laughed. One of the men still sitting down raised his head and looked at me. I knew by the way he looked that he was Flop Gannon, but nobody would ever have picked him out for a gunman.

He had the blackest hair I ever saw, and the whitest skin. When I first flashed him I thought he was a hop head, because he was so white, and later on I found out he was. But when a jam came he proved he had a mighty steady nerve and was as game as a man could be. He smiled a little when Snift spoke, and there was an inquiring look on his face. He left the talking to Snift, so I knew he was smart.

"You must know the kid," Snift laughed. "You an' him pulled off a prowl an' you told him to come to me if he hit this burg!"

Still Flop never cracked a thing, just sat there grinning. He must have known I was all right or Snift never would have brought me up there. Then Snift turned to me and said: "Ain't you goin' to shake with yer old buddy, kid?"

"The laugh's on me," I said, walking over to Flop Gannon, "but you gotta hand it to me. I'm in!"

Flop took my hand, and I felt that his fingers were long and strong. His eyes were steady as standing lights and his chin looked as square as my old man's. It did not stick out and his eyes were not close together. He shook hands, but he never spoke a word.

"This is the kid that has been at Skinny's," Snift cracked, as though that explained everything, and it seemed it did, because Flop tossed back his head and his lips formed a soundless "Oh." One or two of the others laughed and a big, tall one came over and slapped me on the back.

"Damned if we don't hand it to you," he said. "I wish you coulda seen an' heard that dick tellin' us all about you here. For a while you had them guessin' plenty!"

Snift set a bottle on the table and the gang broke off the game and went to a little cabinet on the wall

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Me-Gangster.

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and took glasses. I went along and we all had a couple of drinks.

You could have knocked me kicking with a feather when Flop Gannon filled his glass about a quarter full of liquor and the rest with siphon! I wondered if he was thinking of running for alderman, but the way he handled the bottle and the way he enjoyed the drink showed me he must have been a gentleman.

Take this whole gang and they were way ahead of Dutch and Nick and Twist and Dandy and Slug. This was a real gang, all right, and they took a dollar where we got a cent, and on top of that they did not look at all tough. They were all well dressed and they talked only when it seemed necessary and then they talked pretty good.

"The way this kid worked around me was good," Snift was explaining to them. He smiled with every word and those gold teeth of his seemed to fit just right with the rest of his face. "When he cracked that about Flop I figgered he was a sweetheart!"

"I got it out of an old paper," I admitted.

Flop just smiled again and nodded toward me as though he saw I was smart and wise to use his name.

Snift asked, "How did you connect me an' Flop together?"

"I figgered you were on the bend an' might be a

friend of Flop's," I answered. "It was just a good an' a lucky guess that I hit you. First I was goin' to see Grapes Quant an' try to work it on him——"

Everybody started to laugh at that crack and one of the gang—the big, tall one again—poked me in the ribs with his thumb and told me it was a mighty lucky break for me that I had kept away from Grapes.

"Why?" I asked. "I figgered he was reg'lar, from what little I could hear."

"He's a rat!" the tall guy cracked. When you call a man a rat in the under world that is the worst you can say for him, and the way this big guy talked I went for the racket. I guess I looked pretty serious until I happened to see Flop's face. Then I knew I was getting a bum steer, and I looked up quick at the tall guy and saw the same grin on his face.

"A rat?" I asked. "I dunno nothin' about the town, but I never heard anythin' against Grapes."

"He's an awful mug," the tall guy cracked. "If you had gone to him he would have tipped off the bulls on you. Nobody knows Grapes better'n me. It makes me sore the way he cuts in on Snift's booze racket!"

I knew this was some kind of a play to make a chump out of me, so I just shut up. Snift said, "He's a rotten saloonkeeper, this Grapes. I sell more booze in an hour than he does in a month."

Everybody laughed like that was a whale of a joke, and in a minute the tall guy poked me in the ribs again and said, "I tell you to keep away from Grapes. Take my word fer it, he's a tough baby. He would take this mob in one hand an' throw 'em right out of the window, Flop first. I know him best of all—I'm him!"

He held out his hand and I shook, and you can see for yourself the kind of a break these birds were getting. They were all together and nobody could move without them knowing all about it. But there was one thing that struck me funny in what he said. It was that crack about Flop.

I could see they all thought Flop was pretty tough, and yet he was about the smallest man in the room. I found out later on why this was. Flop was the best machine-gun handler in the country. If I start talking about that now I will get ahead of my story, but I want to say that I saw Flop do his stuff a little later on, and there never will be a better one!

After we had another drink I met the other guys. One of them was Mickey Flenk, and I could see that Snift and Mickey and Grapes were the birds who kept out of sight and pulled the strings for Glench. The other two, besides Flop, in the room were Carrots Bell and Gip Marr.

Just as soon as I flashed Gip I recognized him from pictures I had seen in the papers that made me

come to this town when I beat it from home. He was a fairly big guy, but his right leg was all twisted up and he limped like he was going to fall down when he moved around. I remembered the story about him.

He had stuck up a bank in a small town not far from where we were sitting and a game sheriff had blasted away at him for fair. A couple of shots had taken effect in Gip's right leg and made a vine of it, and he had been pinched. A week after he was pinched he beat the can and never had been heard of since. I could see the answer now. Glench and his mob had sprung the Gip from jail and healed him up, probably right here in this spot. I wondered how he could work in a quick stick-up with a leg like that.

We sat around smoking and talking and now and then having a drink. Nobody asked me any questions. They seemed to take me for granted. It was like each one had his own place and was not interested in what a new guy might do. I guess they all trusted Snift and bet that he knew what he was doing.

I felt pretty secure and pretty happy over the break I was getting. I was in the mob now, anybody could see that, and I figured the thing to do was shut up until somebody propositioned me and told me the cut I would get and what I had to do to get it. They were all so nice and laughed so much

and kidded back and forth all the time that I could hardly believe they were gangsters that lugged machine guns around.

It was after midnight when somebody opened the door into the little library. I grinned when I saw who it was; I could not help it. The man was the dick that had trailed me so long down around Rift's. Imagine that bird making a stall to pinch me as a stranger and a suspect of having pulled off the bank wagon stick-up! He knew all about it before it even was pulled-off!

He winked at me and went over to the table and took a drink. After he had smacked his lips he looked at Snift and asked, "Brad shown up yet?"

"Not yet," Snift cracked.

"He'll be along soon," the dick said. "Everything is fixed. The old man sent the guns out this afternoon and they're waitin' at the shop."

Flop showed a little interest then. For the first time I heard him speak, and he did it in a voice almost like a girl's, it was so soft and steady. "Which ones?" was all he asked.

"The ones you wanted," the dick said proudly; "the same ones we used on the bank job. They are goin' out to be tested an' adjusted an' balanced, an' they get returned to the department in four days. The gag is that they have been used in the shootin' gallery an' the department wants to be sure they are right in case any more stick-ups break."

Flop smiled just a little and nodded his head.

"Brad is goin' to bring one over tonight?" Grapes asked.

"He said he would," the dick answered. "He might as well. Flop here wants it, an' I can't see that we're takin' any chances to worry about. It's a cinch the old man'll have it fixed so's nobody is goin' to start hollerin' for them before we pull the job."

"I like to get the feel of 'em, Snift," Flop said casually, and Snift nodded like he understood.

In about fifteen minutes the door opened again and a new guy came in. Flop got up and took a package from him. "Hello, Brad," he cracked, quiet-like; "let me fondle that baby."

"It's the one you wanted, Flop," Brad answered, "or, if it ain't, we'll git the one you wanted!" I did not like this bird as well as I did the others. Brad was boastful, and you could tell he was a crooked copper as far as you could see him.

But I watched Flop undo that package, and finally I walked over and saw what it was—a machine gun. I never did see such a murderous contrivance as that thing was. It was short and had what I thought were three handles on it, but almost as soon as Flop got hold of it he snatched one of the handles off, and I saw it was really a cartridge clip that stuck down just ahead of the trigger guard.

Under the barrel of the rifle was one grip that was

notched for fingers and at the rear of the gun was another. They were just like big pistol grips. Laying on the table where Flop had put it, was a wooden stock that fitted on the rear of the gun in case you wanted to fire from the shoulder like an ordinary rifle.

"This is the baby I wanted," Flop announced after he had swung the thing up to level and gripped both handles. Then he stood in the center of the room and played it around just like a guy might handle a garden hose. It gave me the creeps just to see the nifty way he done it. I must have shown it in my face, because Flop grinned at me and said:

"Never seen one before, eh? These things are what makes the roads open up, kid! Try it."

He slipped the gun into my hands, and I found it only weighed nine pounds and you could handle it fast as lightning.

"Gee! What a hell-rippin' thing this would be," I grunted.

"Fifteen hundred shots a minute when you want to blast your way out, kid," Flop laughed. "When they hear the song this rod sings they creep away into corners like mice in a warehouse!"

"Fifteen hundred a minute?" I asked, looking at them all to see if they were kidding.

"At that rate," Snift cracked. His smile was still working and a little bit of boastfulness showed in his manner. "All you got to do is turn that little

switch on the side of her there an' hold the trigger back! Put the switch on automatic." He came over and showed me, and Flop looked on like a father seeing his kid operated on.

I could see they meant it and the gun really worked that fast. What a break for anybody that wanted to make trouble! The thing fired a .45 caliber automatic cartridge, and when I picked up a few of them they sure were brutal-looking babies.

Flop handled the gun like a machinist does a cutting tool. I mean, he took hold of it and you could see the difference in his touch right away. Sometime hand your watch to a jeweler and see how different he handles it than you do, then you will know what I mean.

All of a sudden Flop looked up at the dick. "You said we had it for four days?" he asked, and the dick nodded again. Then Flop looked at Snift and his eyes asked a big question. Snift answered it.

"I figgered on Thursday, Flop," he said. "We'll take that sucker mob out at Gander's Mills. That's why I let the kid in tonight," nodding at me. "I figger he can go out there an' get the lay of the land, an' then we can use him in the pay-off. He can walk around there with nobody apt to recognize him."

"Thursday's all right with me, Snift," Flop cracked back at him. "The sooner the quicker. I'll pull that one, then we can break off for a while. I

can stand a little trip for my health. There's a broad I'm sweet on out in Frisco."

"Count me in," I said. "If you're plannin' to stick that black baby that speaks fifteen hundred times a minute under somebody's kisser, the only place fer me is on the right end of it!"

"We are goin' to stick up Gander's Mills on Thursday," Snift told me, still smiling his gold teeth into view, "an' this will be your break. They pay their help on Thursdays an' we'll let you get the dope fer us on the lay of the land."

"Anythin' you say," I cracked, trying to be cool, but knowing I was in on a big play at last.

"He can do that," Flop said, "an' he can handle the sawed-off when we make the grab."

Snift nodded and turned again to me: "You can park here, kid. Back of this is bedrooms, an' we'll feed you as good as Rift or Skinny did." He laughed uproariously at that. "We'll have a snappy talk tonight an' lay out the plant. We got three days to work in."

That was all that was said about it then, but Flop stuck over in the corner monkeying with the machine gun, and I finally took a hand in the poker game, knowing all the time that I was headed for one of these new holdups where the only birds that have no chance are the birds with the money and the police.

I would get the lay of the land and I would

handle the sawed-off, whatever that meant. I may as well tell you now that it meant a ten-inch-barrel shotgun with two barrels, and buckshot shells that spread like hail in the wind. I handled it and never will forget that fact, but let that come a bit later on when I tell, in the order things happened, just what kind of a business it is to grab a pay roll with the help of a machine gun, a sawed-off and six regular automatic pistols. The way this gang worked was pretty slick.

XII

AFTER Flop got his hands on the machine gun there was no chance of getting him into the poker game. I suppose it is hard to believe that a man could love the feel of a thing like that but, for me, I believe Flop did.

The dick and Brad were both bad losers, and Grapes Quant was the best poker player I ever saw. They played a steep game, but now that I was in the gang with them I did not care. I knew I was looking at real dough and by Thursday or Friday I would make a clean-up. But I was just as well pleased when Snift called me out of the game and took me into another room. It was the second big room with the gambling table in the center of it, and the first thing he did was to fill the two steins and we had a beer and lit up cigarettes.

Snift got right down to business: "Tomorrow mornin'," he smiled, his gold teeth lighting up his face like little torches, "we want you to go out and get the layout of the streets around the Gander Mills. Make up a little map of them and be sure to watch out for bad holes in the pavement we got to travel. What we want to know is the best way of meetin' that pay-roll outfit when they land at the

mills, see? We already got the time settled. We been watchin' that for weeks, an' we'll post a man at the bank to telephone us when the car leaves there. But we got to be careful about bein' seen out there, an' we figgered we could use you for the street layout, because nobody in town knows you."

"I get you," I cracked, feeling that they were trusting me a good deal and promising myself they never would be sorry they had, "an' I know what you want. But the whole town is strange to me an' all I can get is the streets right around the spot."

"That's all we want. We ain't askin' you to tell us what to do, kid. We know that. What we are askin' of you is to git out there an' bring back a little map of the streets leadin' away from the plant. Also the condition them streets is in. Another thing we want is the location of the two fire-alarm boxes nearest the mills. Make a good guess how far it is from the curb of the street up to the door enterin' the mills too.

"You want to be sure that none of the streets is blocked off, an' watch out fer holes in them that might bust up a car. We'll pull this job by usin' an automobile, see? An' the get-away has gotta depend on our not gummin' the works by runnin' up a blind alley an' findin' a sewer open right across in front of us.

"You bust out there tomorrow mornin' an' call at the Gander office. You better tell 'em that you're

an insurance agent an' want to see the president. They'll throw you out in a nice way, but you can crack somethin' about cuttin' their fire rates by lookin' over the lay of the land. Tell 'em you will send in a bid later on, an' pretend you want it to reach the real boss.

"Then if they see you measurin' hydrants an' wanderin' around the neighborhood lookin' fer fire-alarm boxes, they won't think nothin' of it. The whole section runs to warehouses, an' you want to figger out the best way to pull off the job an' then see if the streets we gotta use are in good shape an' open all the way through to some big main street. Savvy?"

"I got you, Snift," I agreed. "Some of the guys can tell me the way out to this joint an' I'll carry along a notebook like I was really a sap. I'll draw a map of the streets in the book an' bring you a picture of the whole works."

"An' keep yer yap shut," Snift warned. "We ain't guys that do a lot of talkin'."

"Don't make me laugh," I cracked, grabbing up the steins and going to fill them up. "Wait till I git back from this Gander joint an' see if you've picked a bloomer."

After that he led me back through the library and on into a room where there were four cots. He told me to take one in a corner, and I undressed and turned in, because the beer, on top of the hooch, had

made me sleepy. But I kept thinking about Flop Gannon. I could see him handling that machine gun and, honestly, just the idea of his white face and black eyes and steady hands behind that machine gave me the creeps. I mean, against that thing and Flop, nobody had a chance in the world.

The next morning I went out to the mills. Snift had said that the neighborhood ran to warehouses, but he was not quite right in that. There were warehouses and mills both, but besides those were three little stores and a crummy-looking restaurant that was run by a greasy Greek who stood in the doorway when I walked past it.

Right across from the entrance to the mills was a corner decorated by a saloon in need of a coat of paint. I stood there a second and a guy came out and hung out a blackboard sign that said something about beef stew and good brew for thirty-five cents.

It was about eleven-thirty when I got out there, and I figured a lot of the men working in the mills would pile into the saloon when the noon whistle blew. I wanted to be out of there by that time, so I crossed over and entered the office door. The place looked like a hotel lobby. Whoever Gander was, he must have had a soft thing for himself.

There was a little blond girl sitting at a desk that matched her hair, and when I went in she got up and walked over to me and asked if she could do anything for me.

"I'm an insurance man," I cracked, "an' I'd like to see the owner of this place." She looked me over quick and I guess she was on her job all right.

"Have you an appointment?"

"Nope. I just dropped in because I figger I can save him some real money, lady. Mebbe if you tell him that, we can get together and crack this pot open."

She smiled a little, then asked me to wait. Back on her desk there was a telephone, and she spoke into that a couple of minutes and finally came back to me and said: "I'm terribly sorry, but I'm afraid Mr. Squires cannot see you. Mr. Squires would have charge of insurance, and he says that we are covered for several months and he would not be interested."

"Well," I cracked, "he can't be such a smart guy when he won't even talk to a bird that promises to save him money, but I guess I'll have a look around an' write him a letter. If I can find out just what the lay of land is here, I can give him lower rates, I bet."

She smiled, and then I understood why Mr. Gander had her there to meet people. She made a very good impression on me; in fact, she made as much as three impressions on me with one smile. When I took out my notebook and started out to get a diagram of the streets, my mind was on Mary, and I wanted to see her. The girl had done that to me.

Good girls are like cops, I guess. You can always tell them at a glance.

But thinking of Mary as I walked through the streets about the mill did not take my mind off the thing I must do. As a matter of fact, it seemed to make me all the keener. I guess I felt I was really doing this thing for her, because once I got a roll I would beat it to the Coast and go straight. I believed Mary would come to me in the end.

One of the streets was bad. It was narrow and made of cinders, and in the center it was full of holes and bumps. If a guy had to do any shooting in the get-away, that street would never do. How could he aim?

Right in front of the mill door there was a street that led away to a main crossing two blocks off, and this street was only a short block away from the cinder one. It seemed to me that the best scheme would be to park the car in the cinder street and wait for the suckers to come with the dough. Then we could swing into the street the mill was on, grab the mint and just turn into this well-paved street that led to a dozen easy get-aways. I walked four blocks down the street leading away from the mill door and the pavement was fine and open. Then I tried each cross street of the four, and they were all open, so we could turn off if we had to do it.

Each street I drew into a kind of rough map in the notebook. I even wrote the names of the streets

down and marked what was on each corner, just so that Snift and the bunch could see I was smart as well as game. I certainly did not want any dumbness on my part to do me out of this great break! They would look my stuff over pretty close when I got back and a dumb touch might ruin my chances.

After that I walked about eight miles looking up fire-alarm boxes, and marked the nearest two in the notebook just as they stood in relation to the mill. They were not very far away either. It was a warehouse section and fire was dangerous, I guess, so they had plenty of protection. Then I went back to Snift's place and Flop was still fussing with the gun, but his face had changed. He had oiled the gun and cleaned it and taken it apart about a dozen times.

"They claim," he said, "that everyone of these guns has a hidden serial number on it somewhere. They say if you did find the number you could not take it off without puttin' the gun out of commission. I think they're liars; I can't find any number but the one in plain sight!"

"Don't toss the gun over the side on that account!" Brad gasped. "They'd spot that as a police-department gun in ten seconds——"

"You talk like a sweaty fish!" Flop snarled, and just the way he cracked that showed the tough side of him. Believe me, Brad had nothing more to say. Neither did Flop. He looked me all over when I

came in, and he nodded back at me when I spoke to him, but he did not speak out loud.

He seemed nervous and touchy, and I did not wonder, because I knew he was the one to handle that machine gun and that was enough to give a savage the creeps! He kept walking around the room, and finally he left and Brad turned to me and whispered: "Wants his hop, Flop does. Let him alone. He'll be fine when he gets a needle of dope."

Later on Snift came in, and Flop and him and I went over my maps. I told them all I had done and showed them the maps I had drawn and even the plan I had about the parking the car on that cinder street while we waited for the pay-roll car to show.

When I had finished, Snift grinned up at Flop. "Well," he grunted, "was I right?"

"I guess you were, Snift. It's all right with me. . . . Where is that guy with my shot?"

"He'll git here in a few minutes, Flop. You know them things are apt to take a little time. You wanna go a little easy too. Be in good shape to pull this job."

"I know what I'm doin'," Flop snarled back at him. "You goin' to start tellin' me how to handle my own racket now? Git somebody else if you like the idea!"

Snift just grinned, and I knew he was being easy with Flop because Flop's nerves were all shot waiting for dope. I thought they might be steaming

him up by degrees and stalling along so that he could take a good shot just before we started out on the job. That would make a tough egg out of a bird like Flop Gannon. I remembered Coky Nott——

Flop lit a cigarette, but he only took a puff or two off it and then threw it away. I guess it tasted pretty flat to him. After that he jerked out of the room and left me alone with Snift.

"You know the game there, I guess, kid?" Snift cracked, his gold teeth showing and his head jerking after Flop.

"Hop," I grunted. "Holdin' back on him, are you?" When I said that Snift looked around quick like he was afraid Flop might have heard and got suspicious, but Flop was gone into the other room.

"You're pretty smart, kid," Snift said in a whisper, "but never put an idea like that in his nut. He'd raise blue hell, I'm tellin' you! We gotta keep him steamed up for this next job."

I nodded and began to think I was pretty smart at that, until Snift pulled some papers out of his inside vest pocket and spread them out on the table. He laughed again as he did it, and you can imagine how surprised I was when I saw they were the same maps, only better, that I had drawn that very day!

"You had it all the time?" I cracked. "An' I walked about eleven miles wastin' time!"

"You ain't wastin' time showin' us that you are

on the level with us," Snift said. "Flop likes to be more than sure, so I agreed to prove you up once more. . . . Now here's the plan—if you're still dead sure you want to go through with us——"

"Certainly I do!" I said, at the same time swearing. "You guys are about as careful as a politician at a mass meetin'!"

"Which ain't so tough to think about after you've thought it all over," Snift grinned, and I had to agree with him.

"Go ahead with the plan," I cracked. "Let's get down to business. I'm sick of mopin' around like a lost sheep."

"You're in on this fer one reason only," Snift cracked. "We know you ain't afraid to use a rod. Now get me: Thursday comes the pay-off. We will have a man at the bank to telephone us when the Gander car leaves with the dough. We will have a man stationed at each of these fire-alarm boxes on the maps here. You will see that there are stores near each box, an' we happen to know that each of them stores has a public telephone in it. The car generally gits away from the bank between twenty minutes after an' half-past eleven. At twenty minutes after, these guys at the fire boxes will telephone here.

"They'll talk like they was sellin' somethin' an' callin' their central office, see? They'll leave the telephone-booth door open an' let people hear 'em

promise to wait till we call 'em back. Then they'll go outside in the store an' buy somethin' an' hang around pretendin' they are to hear from their boss.

"Just as soon as we are tipped that the car has left the bank, we telephone these birds at the stores. They step out an' walk around the corner, an' when twelve minutes has passed, they crack in a fire alarm. That means two alarms from that district at the same time.

"On a call like that Engines 12, Hose Company an' Ladder Truck 3 answer. The only way the fire companies can make the run from these stations is the way we ain't goin' when we grab that dough, see? Everybody around there will be chasin' up to the fire, an' in the excitement we make the get-away. All we gotta do is time it right, an' I guess we've done that."

I mean, they even had the streets figured that the fire trucks would use in the quickest run to the alarm boxes and knew just about how long the run would take. They had planned on this job for a long time and had even timed the Gander outfit, until they knew exactly how long the car would be going from the bank to the mill.

I found out afterward they were satisfied that the pay-roll car would take twelve minutes longer than the fire department, and that was why the guys were to wait that long before cracking the alarms.

They knew just what they needed to know before

they lifted a finger, and when they did start to work, after all that planning, what a break they gave everybody else! It was a case of going out and getting what they wanted, and when Flop cut loose with that machine gun anybody that had other ideas either saw the light or lost it altogether.

Snift went on, and I could see in his manner of speaking that he was pretty well satisfied with everything the gang had to work with and proud of the way they schemed it all out: "All those factories and warehouses out there get the alarm at the same time the fire department does," he explained, "and when it sounds you will see the volunteer companies from each place beat it for hoses and hand trucks."

It was a cinch that Snift could see the admiration in my eyes, because he flashed his gold teeth again and leaned across the table and pushed my arm in a fooling way.

"What it takes to get dough, baby," he cracked, "we got! When we start out, we score."

"What is my job on this racket, Snift?" I asked. "You sure got me convinced plenty."

"Flop says keep you in the car with him. You'll handle the sawed-off an' you can talk with Flop an' get just what you are goin' to do. Then, kid, you wanna do it. Flop is bad when he's splashin' that machine gun around, an' anybody that balled things up he would turn the gun on."

"I ain't goin' to ball things up. Gimme my orders, Snift," I told him, "an' lemme know somethin' about my end on this play, will you? What do I figger for a cut of the winnin's?"

"The cut is the same fer everybody except Flop," Snift explained. "Flop gits the big end, outside Gl—— I mean, outside what we have to shell fer—others."

"Protection?" I grinned. He nodded, and right away he explained it: "Sure. After all, they give us the gun, an' if anythin' should go sour they gotta play the game with us."

"I'm fer that—but how many cut? Suppose we knock off fifty grand, where would I sit then?"

"You'd be a sure shot fer five, kid. But I figger we'll take plenty more'n that. Gander's Mills is the biggest around here an' they oughta hand out twice what you say."

"That's all I wanted to know," I agreed. "I'm lookin' ten grand in the eye fer my end, that right?"

"You can figger your own end," Snift cracked. "You'll get a clean break from us, an' here's the figgers. Half to the outside birds that play with us. The other half cut an even five ways an' each of the five givin' back to Flop 10 per cent of their end. It oughta be a nice score, kid."

"Lead me to it."

"Sure. But wait'll an hour or so passes, an' then

I'll slip Flop a shot of dope an' he'll feel great an' be able to talk straight to you."

I just hung around awhile smoking cigarettes and drinking beer. Flop walked around the joint like a lion in a cage. I could see he was getting madder and madder because the hop did not come, but he never suspected that the other birds were building him up so as to have him right for the big play at Gander's Mills. By the time they finally brought him his stuff I was ready to get away from him and hide.

His eyes were bigger than I ever saw them and his hands kept twitching and turning like snakes that had been run over in the road. There was a funny thing he did with his cheeks that made them jump right up and down, and it was a long time before I got wise to the fact that he never knew he was doing it. Lots of hoppies get that trick. It is the nerves or muscles in the flesh right around their eyes. They keep jerking and the faces they make would give a guy the heeby-jeebies.

But after he got the shot he calmed right down and his eyes got smaller, and inside them, where the pupils were, they changed mighty quick. Instead of being big and round, they got as small as pin points, and there seemed to be a bright light behind each one, just like somebody had stuck a pin through a black sheet that was covering an electric bulb. The jumping in his cheeks stopped and he got real

talky and friendly, and finally started to whistle and walk around the room all easy and comfortable. God help Flop, I thought, if he ever landed in a spot where he could not get his dope!

About an hour passed before I talked with him. During that time I took a shot of whisky and offered him one, but he refused and winked at me and pointed to his arm where he had taken the shot. I guess hoppies do not get any kick out of liquor; it is too mild.

Just before Flop and me talked, Snift whispered to Brad that they had Flop just right, so that when we started out on the Gander job he would be wanting another shot and would make things quick and snappy in order to get back and get it. Snift said he would be vicious then. That suited me. I knew, now that I had seen Flop when he wanted his stuff, that nobody would be very apt to stop him from getting it.

"You are goin' to toss the sawed-off," Flop said, when we got to talking; "so I'll break it out an' give you a slant at it." He brought out a funny-looking gun that was about eighteen inches long and built just like a shotgun. It had two barrels, side by side, but they were only ten inches long. The butt was just like a pistol. When I saw the thing I thought of a pistol like they used in the Revolutionary War. Once when I was in school they took us to the museum and I saw that pistol there.

This gun was just like that, except it was all new and the barrels were bored what they call cylinder bore instead of choke bore. It weighed about four to five pounds and I could slip in right down my trouser leg. I thought it was almost as bad as the machine gun, but Flop soon took that idea out of my head.

"That makes a hell of a noise," he explained, "an' when it nicks a guy he thinks sure he's dead. But it's only good at thirty yards, because the shot spreads so fast. Don't crack it too quick. When things break you'll be standin' on the left runnin' board of the car. Carrots Bell will take the other side, an' he'll have one of these too. When the pay car shows we'll swing out of that cinder road an' drive up to meet it. They always travel that street leading right up to the mill door.

"As we pass 'em, you an' Carrots will step to the runnin' board of our car. I'll wait till we get by 'em, so's I can get the range with the machine gun, in case they put up a fight. Then, when I crack the word, you drop off an' flash this gun. Carrots'll do the same on the other side of our car. Whichever of you gits first crack at the bag with the money in it, grabs it an' hollers. Then you both git back to the car an' git aboard. But keep apart, see? Keep a good distance between you an' leave me room enough to splash a few dozen out of Sweet Marie without hittin' you guys."

He went over the thing three or four times with me, just to be extra careful, but I got the idea right off. Simple it was, and easy to work. Sure to get results too. Because when a bird got a look at those shotguns he would know he was up against the machine-gun gang as well, and then, when Flop told me he would blaze about ten or twelve shots into the air over our heads while we were working, that made it a cinch.

I know if I was guarding a wagon and a gang cut loose with that machine-gun thing, I would never argue with them. I would rather look a little yellow and take a chance of finding them later when the breaks were nearer even.

But even when things were as simple as I have told you, we had to sit around every two hours and drill the thing over and over again. Carrots and me stood on chairs and stepped off to the floor just like we would when we did the trick from the car. We carried the guns and practiced keeping apart.

Flop stood on a chair and showed just how he would spray shots with the machine gun. First he would make believe shoot over our heads, then he would shoot between us while we got back to the car, in case these guards got nasty.

I found out what poor crippled Gip Marr did. He was the driver of the car and the way they talked about his driving I knew that he was good. Once, they said, he had wheeled through cross traf-

fic and only lost one fender. He took a chance when he had to, but he knew his onions and always got through.

Snift and Grapes and Brad sat about making suggestions and bringing up points, but they never did much good. We covered about everything that could happen. The only thing that could lick us was to have the car go bad, and we decided if that happened, to get aboard any car that came along and shoot our way out of the jam.

"An' in case you should git knocked off," Brad said, "leave the machine gun out of it. Don't nobody crack a single thing an' we'll find a way to spring you outa the can before long. Thursday mornin' a report will go to the captain of a certain station that the department guns have been stolen. Then if things break sour nobody can prove the gang didn't steal this gun. That will keep the old man out of it and let him work later on.

"Of course, things won't go sour, but in case they do, this report'll be there all reg'lar an' the captain an' the shop guy supposed to be fixin' the gun, have an out. They'll never make the report if we git the smoke box back Thursday afternoon; which we will."

You can see for yourself how we planned. Every loophole was plugged and all that remained was to pull the job and count the sugar.

Wednesday night about ten o'clock they gave

Flop a shot of hop, and I knew that was the last he would get until we were back with the sugar in our kick. I noticed that everybody was a little talky and trying to be light and funny, but I did not sleep much. Even with all the odds on our side I felt kind of nervous and jumpy.

XIII

BY nine o'clock the next morning we started out. Flop and me went together, because we were going to the gang garage and I did not know the way. The others went alone.

The machine gun was stowed away in a lot of paper and dropped into a gunny sack. Snift called one of the dumb porters in his saloon and gave him the sack and told him to carry it to the garage. The porter never even guessed what he had.

By the time Flop and me got there the others had arrived and Gip was busy tuning up the motor of a big car. It was an eight-cylinder car painted plain black; a touring car, it was, and the top was black too.

Flop got the machine gun out of the sack and looked it all over carefully. Carrots and me looked over our sawed-offs, but I did not know much about them and had to take Flop's word that mine was all right. Then we loaded them up and stowed them in the back of the big car.

There was room to slip all three guns down behind the cushion on the back seat. Flop sat in the

middle and showed us once more just how we were to work. That was the first time I saw that the top of the car was not fastened to the body at the back.

The garage was closed and locked, and over the door there was a sign that said it was owned by some guy who did repair work cheap. So we could practice in there. Flop sat on the seat, and when we stepped off the running board and started back like we would after the pay roll, he slid the machine gun right out over the back seat through the part of the top that was not fastened. There was no glass in the back of the top, either, and that let Flop get a good view and hear plainer what went on.

At eleven-fifteen we had been ready for half an hour, and I noticed that Flop was more nervous than any of us. His eyes were big again and his cheeks jerked just a little bit. Believe me, he was ripe for this stick-up. He was needing his hop, but he was steady enough to go through quick so that he could get back and grab his shot.

Gip went to the telephone and called Snift. Then he sat there holding the receiver to his ear so that they would be all connected when Snift got word that the pay car had left the bank. While they were waiting for that, Snift told Gip that both the fire-alarm guys had called in and the Gander paymaster was at the bank the same as usual. Everything looked hotsy-totsy, as the saying is.

But with Gip sitting at that telephone and Flop

pacing up and down the little garage, and a mechanic I had never seen before standing by to open the door for us, time went past mighty slow. Flop kept asking the mechanic: "You all set, now, Greasy? Got everything you need an' got it ready to work fast?"

Greasy would swear and say again and again that he had everything and would do a fast job when it came his turn. I did not horn in on this racket, because I did not know what Flop was talking about and did not care much. All I saw was that the tires on the car were new and would not puncture easy, or blow out, and that Gip was sure of his gas and his engine.

"Right, Snift!" I heard Gip crack from the telephone. Then he snapped up the receiver and I knew we were off. Gip climbed into the car and slipped the gears into reverse. The mechanic opened the door and the three of us, Flop in the middle, climbed onto the back seat. Then Gip backed out and we saw the garage door close after us.

"That damned Greasy better be as ready as he says he is," Flop snarled. "We gotta git this job done an' git back." He was sitting pretty still on the seat, but his eyes were wide inside and out, and his cheeks were jerking more and more, and I saw his hands doing that funny snaky dance on his knees.

"Take it easy, Flop," Carrots grunted. "This is the softest touch we've had."

A William Fox Production. *Me-Gangster.*

JIMMY THE KID LOOKS ON AT HIS DAD'S DISCOMFITURE DURING A TONGUE LASHING BY BILL LANE, POLITICAL BOSS.

"Shut up!" Flop snapped, and Carrots did, so I never cracked a thing. Somehow, Flop was mighty nasty when he wanted his shot and had to wait for it.

Gip certainly could drive a car. We slid along at a steady pace and I knew he was trying to match the speed the Gander's pay car would make. He was planning not to wait too long on that little cinder road.

When we got out near the mill Flop started to laugh a little, and I heard fire bells and sirens and knew that others were working on time just as we were. We swung into the street that the mill was on and started for the cinder road. On the way we met a lot of saps in overalls dragging a fire truck toward us. Gip slowed down and they turned off before we reached them. I mean, nobody was saying anything at all and everything was running just like the big motor under Gip's twisted leg—smooth and easy and sure.

At the little restaurant there was only one guy in sight. He was the swarthy chump that had hung out the stew sign. We could hear the engines blowing and ringing their bells over on the next block and the street we were on was as empty as a morning-after bottle.

Gip pulled up at the cinder street and backed into the left-hand side of it, facing the mill. He kept out far enough so that we could see the entrance

to the mill and the next street, out of which the pay-roll wagon would show.

"Now," Carrots cracked, "if them mugs don't stop to see the fire, we got the world by the tail."

"They won't stop fer no fire," Gip growled, "not with a hunnerd grand in their laps! In about three minutes them firemen will be lookin' all over town fer a place to do their stuff too."

Flop was not paying any attention to them. He shoved me aside and took out the machine gun. Right ahead of the trigger guard he set on a disk of shells. It was black and round and about an inch and half thick. There were fifty shots in it. On the outside of the disk there was a ridge that you screwed up and that made a heavy spring throw shells into the chamber.

Flop screwed the spring up by turning it eleven times, and I saw him count pretty carefully so that he would not go wrong and make the gun jam or something. Then he laid the thing across his knees and I drew back from the barrel. He grinned and his cheeks jerked when he saw me. He snapped the elevated sights up and down and twisted the control onto automatic. The gun was ready for business.

"Git that blunderbuss of yours out," he said, and I drew out the sawed-off. He looked it over quick and handed it to me. Flop certainly was careful even when he was jumpy and crazy for hop. In

a minute he handed Carrots his gun and we slid them down beside our legs inside the car. That was the first I noticed that my hands were all wet in the palms.

While we waited a workman came along the cinder road and started across the street toward the mill. He saw us and grinned. "False alarm, I guess," he said. "There don't seem to be no fire anywhere." Before any of us could answer him, Gip cracked something sharp and Flop sat up.

Coming out of the wide street about a hundred yards away was the pay-roll wagon. Gip swung around the corner and pulled toward the mill. It all worked out great, because the money bus had to back up and turn in front of the mill. Just as they got to the curb we passed them and Gip cracked the brake so that he could make a sharp turn into the wide street and step on the gas as soon as Carrots and me were back in the car.

"Beat it!" Flop cracked at us, and Carrots and me were over the side and into the street together, each of us flashing a sawed-off in his right hand and bearing down on two birds that left the rear of the pay-roll wagon with a big black bag between them.

"Drop it!" Carrots cracks at them, his voice sounding almost as sharp and as hard as a shot. Right behind us came the worst noise I ever heard. I almost ducked and looked back but I caught myself in time.

Flop had cut loose with that machine gun, and if you never heard one I am not going to try to tell you how it sounds. It is not a lot of fast shots. It is just a kind of screech that has teeth all through it, and as soon as it starts there comes a lot of hissing and whizzing all around you. I heard it over my head and knew that Flop was doing his old stuff. He was shooting high, to scare the liver out of the guys.

He certainly did that. I was scared pink myself. I stepped a little more aside to make more room between me and Carrots. The two birds with the black bag both carried big rods stuck in belts about their hips, but when they heard that old chatter from Flop they guessed exactly right.

The bag fell between them and their hands went high. Both Carrots and me started for the pay roll, but Carrots got it. The reason was that a third bimbo came from behind the wagon, and he had his rod out and was trying to get a shot at me. I saw him in time and raised the sawed-off. I pulled the trigger and the gun made a whale of a noise. The bird jumped back of the truck again, and by that time Carrots had the bag and Flop was calling us back.

He had quit shooting with the machine gun, and I glanced back and saw that he was watching in all directions through the hole in the top of the car and that the black muzzle of that old gun was still

sticking out over the back seat. Carrots had the big bag in one hand and seemed to find it pretty heavy.

I hollered out to Flop and darted across in front of the pay-roll truck to help Carrots with the bag. He grinned, and as I got hold of the extra handle he swung around and fired his sawed-off onto the left front wheel of the truck. The tire blew almost as loud as the gun. Just to make things right I blazed away through the radiator with my second barrel, and the pay-roll bus began to act like a sprinkling can filled with dirty tea. They never would chase us in that automobile!

We got to our car before the guards did anything, then one of them cracked two shots after us. Right away Flop sprayed a few more splashes from his machine gun, and then Carrots and me were in behind him and Gip had shot into second and made the turn around the corner.

He was up to forty miles an hour before he ever shifted to third speed, and we had worked so snappy that nobody was after us at all. But then came one of those tough breaks that nobody can figure.

A fire chief, finding that the alarms were the bunk, had started out in his car to look for drunks or suspicious characters, and he swung into the street just ahead of us. Right away he started banging his siren, and you would have thought all of Hades was loose. I suppose the sap thought we were run-

ning away from a couple of false alarms. Carrots and me had dropped the big bag in the car and were putting in shells for those we had fired from the sawed-offs.

I swung around the side of the car just as Gip managed to hop a curb and swung past the chief's car. I let fly at the wheels with one barrel of my gun, but the darn gun kicked up so I nearly knocked my own brains out with it. Flop swore at me and gave me a dirty look, and then he just sprayed a couple of showers from Old Nancy, and I wish you could have seen that fire chief return to his own personal duty. In less than two minutes we were out onto the main street and doubling around like a dancing mouse full of moonshine.

There was not a chance in the world of anybody trailing us. Flop kept a close watch out back and Carrots and me stowed away the machine gun and the sawed-offs. Then we covered the bag with a robe and sat back. Both of us lit up cigarettes and Gip done the same thing.

Flop would not take one. "That ain't what I want," he snarled. "Step on this puddle jumper, Gip. I wanna git back to Snift's."

"Are yuh sure about any cars behind us?" Gip asked.

"Would I send you back if I wasn't?" Flop cracked, and there was blazing hell in his voice.

In about half an hour we pulled up at the little

garage and the door opened for us. The mechanic called Greasy was there in his overalls, and I saw Snift himself in the little office where the telephone was. He came out grinning his gold teeth into view and stood beside us as we got out of the car.

"You made out all right?" he asked.

"Sure we did!" Flop cracked. "Let's make the rest of it damned snappy, Snift!"

They took the black bag out of the car and into the office. There they found the gunny sack that had carried the machine gun to the garage and they spread that out and rolled the pay bag into it so it looked like a bum bundle. Right after that Snift dragged out a shot of dope for Flop, and the kick he got out of it almost made me want to take one, because it steadied him right down and I needed that myself.

"Lend a hand, guys," Snift grinned at us. "It'll make it all sure."

We went to the car, and already Greasy had the hood off and one side of the radiator loose. In less than twenty minutes he had switched the black top for a tan one, changed the radiator and switched every door on the car. It was fast work, and clever. I do not think anybody ever would have known that automobile now if they had just seen it out at Gander's Mills.

Greasy then took a sledge and battered the old doors and the radiator all to pieces and parked them

under a pile of junk out back. "Just as soon as you can, Greasy," Snift told him when we had finished, "paint the whole puff box some other color—never mind dust, just do a quick job—an' tell 'em, if they ask, you are doin' it fer a guy you don't know. Tell 'em that he left the car to be painted and you'll collect cash or keep the car. An' remember, it ain't been outa the garage in about a week."

Greasy nodded like he knew his stuff, and after seeing him work on that bus I was willing to believe that he did.

"All the guys are in," Snift told us. "I kept in touch with the joint by telephone. While you guys were ridin' around after the stick-up they came straight in to the place. We'll all go back now, except Carrots, who can watch the take till I send the porter over after it. You guys certainly worked great."

Flop and me walked back to Snift's place together. On the way we passed a couple of policemen and they never made Flop at all. I do not know whether that was real or whether they knew better than to monkey around with any of Glench's pals. We went right in the front door of Snift's and through the office. Nobody paid any attention to us.

You can believe me that I felt glad it was all over. If I live to be a thousand years old I will never forget the noise of that machine gun or how that radiator spurted rusty water after I had tucked

a shower of buckshot into it. Things like that stick very plain in your mind, because they happen at such times, I guess.

Flop was all steady and happy now. His hands were easy and his eyes had narrowed down, especially inside where the pupil is, and his cheeks had quit that terrible jerking. He would not even take a drink when we got back to the rooms, but I took one; I took four, in fact, and I needed them. Even if all the breaks were with us, that is quite a thing to go through, and I am willing to admit that it raised the deuce with my nerves.

When I would close my eyes I could see the front end of that chief's red automobile sweeping into the street ahead of us. But I knew that the fire-alarm gag had been smart, because when we pulled the job there was nobody around the mill except that one workman and that dumb Greek in the restaurant. After a while Carrots got back, and he said he had waited till the porter came for the gunny sack.

"He won't git away for a while, though," Carrots told us. "Snift telephoned, when he sent him, to hold him there until Snift can get him covered on the return trip. I guess he'll git the dick an' two other birds to do that."

So we sat around and waited for the bag we had done so much to get. My mind was all stirred up and I could not calm it down. Now that I had seen for myself how smooth these guys could work, I be-

gan to wonder if they might not work on me! That was the first time I had been suspicious, and I was not really suspicious of them now, but just the same the thought came to me.

I thought of Dandy and Twist and Slug and all the old mob, and even of how Danny himself had crossed both the old man and me, and maybe I lost faith in everybody. It was a cinch these birds could do as they pleased with me. If they wanted to bump me off right here in the rooms, there was nothing to stop them. Nobody ever would trace it down to them and nobody would even recognize me!

There never will be a time when I can forget the way the old man framed my gang, and it came to me, as I sat there in Snift's place, that I was in about the same position they were at that time.

If Glench wanted to cover himself and his close pals by giving me the bump, he certainly had his own way about doing it. But there was not a thing I could do but play a waiting game and try to keep my eyes open. It seemed a sure thing that I would be the first one to go if trouble came. I mean, if the gang was traced down, they would shove me to the front, and then they might or they might not give me a break about getting parole or something afterward.

Looking back at it all now, I can see what a fool a man is to tackle that business of beating the law. I saw that even if these birds played on the level, I

was still up against a tough thing. Suppose I got ten thousand out of this Gander thing—got it in cold cash.

I would still have to trust these guys or else take it on the loop, and how far can a man travel on ten grand? I mean, it is the most expensive thing in the world, this keeping out of sight and not being able to earn money except by doing something that makes you hunted all the more.

I suppose it was all just nerves after the stick-up. I told myself that was it and went and took another drink and lit a cigarette. Flop was walking around the room whistling and feeling great. I picked up a paper and tried to read. It was a morning paper, and for a few minutes I looked at sporting pictures drawn by some artist that certainly could draw fine. There was a ball player and a runner and fighter, and under the picture there was a lot of talk about nerve in sports and having the punch at just the right time.

I had to laugh. I wished some of those birds could hear a machine gun whaling away behind him and then shoot a sawed-off that kicked up in the air so hard you could hardly hold it! They would find out what nerve was if they saw that red automobile shooting out in front of them when they were making a get-away from a job that called for fifteen years sure if your foot slipped.

Every time the door opened I would look up and

hope it was Snift with the gunny sack. I trusted them, all right, but it was hard to wait till I got the feel of that ten grand in my own kick.

Flop was feeling so fine after his shot in the arm that he brought a drink over to where I was sitting. "You done fine," he cracked to me, and I was glad he felt that way and would say so. "The only thing that gimme a laugh about you was shootin' at that fire car. What chance did you have of scorin'? Thirty yards was your range, an' anyhow, you fired damn near straight up in the air!"

"I guess I wanted to scare 'em, Flop."

"Scare hell! They was ready to faint when I cracked Sweet Marie over their skulls!" He laughed, though, and finished up by saying again: "But you done fine—a quick job an' a sure one. I most laughed out loud when them mugs dropped that bag an' let you an' Carrots walk right in on 'em."

"That one guy had a rod out, that's why I shot first. I ain't sure I didn't hit him," I said.

"I am," Flop grinned in friendly fashion. "I'm dead sure you didn't! You fired at his chest, I guess, an' when that thing you had kicked back, the shots scattered all over every roof in the neighborhood."

"Well," I grinned, "it sent him back where he belonged, anyhow." Then I tossed off the drink

Flop had brought me, and he started walking around again, saying that he wished that bag would get there so we could cut the take.

I read some more and finally turned the page that carried the news about my home town. There was always a lot of news flashed about the home town, and I always liked to read it. You would see about the mayor who had come down and helped to beat my old man and you would see about fires and jobs that gangs had pulled off. I was always interested.

But I nearly dropped out of the chair when I saw that Danny Critch had just caught a ten stretch for a holdup. His name was there, and enough about him so that I knew it was my old pal. Danny had tried a stick-up and got himself knocked off. He got ten years for it, and was doing time that very minute! I guess, at that, he learned that there was a pretty big difference between Clancy and my old man!

It did not look as though Danny got much for helping elect Nolan. But news like this was a jolt for me. Not because I was sorry for Danny. After a guy crosses you like he did me and the old man, you lose sympathy for him. But it was hitting pretty close to home, as the saying is.

I was just going to tell Flop about it, when the door opened and Snift came in. He had the gunny sack in his hand and swung it up on to the table.

We all gathered around close and saw him take out his knife and cut away the strings he had tied it with at the garage.

When the sack was opened he lifted out the bag we had been so snappy about collecting for ourselves. Flop and him stood there, and I saw that even Snift's hands were shaking a little and his eyes were bright. The black bag was locked, and over the top there was a steel chain that looked pretty tough.

Flop cussed the thing, but Snift grabbed up the knife he had used to cut the string on the sack and sawed the top right off the bag. Then he reached in, and with Flop and me trying hard to help him, he yanked out a bundle of newspapers that covered up about two dozen plain red bricks.

That was all—just newspapers and bricks!

XIV

I MEAN, what a break! After all that planning and the hot risks we had run—some old newspapers and two dozen bricks!

I stood there looking at Snift and Flop, and I could see in their faces just blank amazement. Of course, I thought of trickery on their part, or on the part of Gip and the porter and the dick, who had handled the bag after we left it at the garage, but I kind of felt that if that bunch had crossed me they had also crossed Snift and Flop. It is easy to sense a man's feelings at a time like that. Nobody could frame up such a thing and act it all out just as this had happened.

For once I saw Snift when his gold teeth did not show in a smile. His eyes had narrowed down to slits and all the hidden viciousness of his character traced itself in wrinkles and lines on his face. Even when I was all upset, I remember thinking that I was glad Flop had got his shot of dope before we discovered this trick. I could imagine him finding those bricks when he needed dope, and the picture gave me shudders. He would have started killing like a cat on a mole hill.

Snift looked at me, and there was suspicion in his eyes. I looked at him with suspicion in mine. Right away I seemed to forget all the ideas I had thought up about what a fool the old man was to fight with the boss and get himself sunk. I would have fought with Snift right then, and I know he would have fought with other members of the gang.

"What the name uh the Christ's the idea here, Snift?" Flop cracked. His voice sounded like Danny's did that time when the old man told us about framing my gang for bumping off Fletch. "Is somebody goin' to cut their own throat tryin' to be smart?" he finished, not giving Snift time to answer his first question.

Snift wet his lips with a tongue that darted around like that of a snake. His hands still rested on the cut top of the bag, and now and then he would dip one of them down and take out another brick, like he was still unconvinced that the pay roll was not there. He finally found words, and said: "Gawd knows! There's somethin' sour about this deal——"

"It'll be sour to the guy that tastes it!" Flop promised, his anger rising all the time, as his mind worked clear of the first jolt we all got when we saw ourselves as saps with just a lot of bricks to show for risking our necks.

"Who?" Snift cracked back, and his voice was nastier than it ever had been before. "What are

you crackin', Flop? Do you mean that——" He did not need to finish the sentence. Flop and I both understood him without that. He was asking if Flop was accusing somebody in the gang of hanging out the double-cross.

Just the idea made Snift so mad that he deserted the table and bag and walked toward Flop with one fist doubled up like a sledge hammer. I could see that he was not afraid of Flop when it came right down to cold turkey. Flop backed away from him a bit, but there was a wicked light in his pin-point eyes.

"I'm askin' what's the idea?" was all he said. Then Snift, like a sudden idea had just hit him, whirled on me:

"You been pretty smart all along," he cracked, in dangerous tones. "What's your idea of this break?"

"My idea," I growled back at him, just as nasty as he did to me, "is that somebody has been smarter than me! I'd like to ask the same thing Flop does!"

Snift turned and went to the cabinet on the wall. He brought out a bottle and took a stiff drink. I went over and took the bottle out of his hand and helped myself. I mean, I was shaking like a leaf and did not know why. Just the shock of grabbing a few bricks, after you had risked your life and planned on grabbing about ten thousand dollars, is enough to upset any guy.

Snift never seemed to notice me take the bottle out of his hand. He just stood there thinking, and his face was still wrinkled up, with his eyes shining like fire. Flop stood over at the table and drummed with his fingers and shifted his weight from one foot to the other. We were all looking at each other like wildcats.

"Somebody has pulled a fast one, Snift," Flop cracked, after a moment of dead silence. "Who is this porter, and who covered him on his way over here from the garage?"

"There's nothin' to that," Snift answered.

"Then it's Gip or Greasy," Flop snapped.

"Yeah?" Snift sneered. "How about the kid here? Mebbe he's a switch artist." As he spoke he shifted his nasty sneer toward me.

"You lie like——" I cracked, mad all through, but the quick rage that twisted Snift's face made me change that, and I finished up with: "I don't exactly mean that, Snift, but I ain't no switch artist, an' if I was I'd like to know where I got a chance to work!"

"The kid's all right," Flop said, much to my surprise. "It goes deeper'n him, Snift. I admit I thought it might be you at first. But whoever it is, they ain't goin' to score with anything as raw as this."

"Well, it ain't me," Snift growled, but the look on his face softened a little and he helped himself

to another drink with a better air about him. "I never crossed a pal in my life, an' you know it."

"How about that dick, or Brad?" I asked. "It's a cinch we ain't goin' to let this thing die with a couple of bricks, are we?"

"I don't believe the dick is in," Snift mused kind of to himself, "an' I don't think Brad is either."

"You don't think anybody is," Flop cracked, "but we got the newspapers an' bricks as pretty fair evidence!"

A crafty look was on Snift's face and I knew his ideas were running deeper than we realized. Until I had a line on his thoughts, there was no sense in my saying anything more. I could see that he was going to get his ideas all straight in his mind before he spoke. When he did start talking his face had twisted into a bit of a grin and I could see he had decided to be smooth about things:

"You see," he said at last, "other guys that were due for a cut of this racket are goin' to do some thinkin' fer themselves. They are goin' to think mighty straight too. They'll mebbe be sayin' that from the time you birds grabbed the bag till you reached the garage, there was only four of you near the works. Cuttin' a haul four ways beats the very devil outa cuttin' it eight or nine slices."

"Meanin' that the kid here, an' me an' Gip and Carrots, done a switch before we ever brought the bag to the garage?" Flop wanted to know.

"I'm only sayin' what they'll be thinkin', Flop," Snift qualified, "an', of course, that'll be a tough crack fer you birds to answer while all of us are lookin' at papers and bricks!"

Well, it would; I could see that.

Snift did not say that I had to stay in the rooms till the thing was straightened out, but I sensed that I never would get out. There are times when a fellow does not have to be told something, and this was one of them. So Flop and I just walked around, and maybe we drank pretty often, and, of course, we did not talk about anything but the fine mess we had found in that bag.

But even then Flop did not say much, and neither did I. There was no telling where a thing like that might lead. I have said before that the greatest weapon honest police have is the suspicions criminals have of one another, and if we all got suspicious of one another, things were sure to break bad for us. So, even though we were boiling over inside, we kept our mouths shut.

About two hours went by before anything new broke. Then it broke good for us in one way and terrible in another. Brad came into the room, and he was waving an afternoon paper. His big bulging eyes were popping right out, like his head was swelling inside.

"What's this steer?" he demanded excitedly. "Is there any truth in that?" His hands were shaking

as he spread the paper on the table before us, and he kept jerking his big head back and forth to watch us as we read. When I saw the headlines I almost fell in a swoon:

DARING BANDITS FOOLED BY ANCIENT TRICK
SURETY COMPANY OFFICIALS CHUCKLING
OVER SIMPLE EXPEDIENT THAT FOILS DESPERATE
MACHINE-GUN GANG

There followed a statement to the effect that the Gander's Mills pay roll had not been carried to the factory in the pay car for the past three months. The company that was insuring them against robbery losses stood the expense of transporting the money in a little roadster, and even the guards of the pay-roll truck were not in on the secret.

I could almost have laughed at Flop and Brad and Snift as they read that account; I would have laughed if I had not felt so rotten about losing the money I had expected to get. Their faces were the funniest I ever saw, and they felt about as cheap as sand in the Sahara. The paper said:

Somewhere in the city is a desperate gang of robbers who are still sucking their thumbs and hiding their faces in humiliation. Every indication is that they planned at great length to execute a huge killing by holding up the Gander's Mills pay roll. Every move they made in completing their coup convinces police that the affair was a

carefully thought-out one, destined to certain success, but for the wisdom and forethought of officials of the surety company.

False alarms that centered excitement about rushing fire apparatus fitted into a scheme almost theatrical in its modernity. High-powered automobiles, sawed-off shotguns and withering machine guns played a part. Men driven to the heights of desperation sprayed the highways with death that they might carry away a black bag filled with newspapers and bricks. . . .

There was a good deal more, but that was all we cared about reading. I mean, who would want to sit and read about their own dumbness? Brad waited until we had caught the gist of the story in the paper, then he jerked it aside and plunged his hands into the open black bag. When his finger tips hit the bricks a moan sounded and his lips turned kind of a bile green. He could not speak, so he just looked a question at us.

We did not have to speak; he understood. He gave a sort of longing glance at the bottle, but I guess his strength was gone, because he staggered over and fell into a leather chair and just sprawled there wheezing and sputtering and muttering, and by turn growing pale and flushed.

The story in the paper explained everything. There was nothing we could say to change it or explain it. If there had been anybody at fault, it certainly was Snift and the fellows protecting the

gang, because they were the ones who had laid all the plans.

That was a very long afternoon and night. The idea of the failure kept growing on me and I felt homesick as a lost kitten. By degrees I read the accounts in the paper. Snift left us and sent us up a fine meal, which I could not eat. Flop took another shot of dope and I thought for a while he was going to die, but he just fell into a heavy sleep, and that made me envy him.

If there was any kicking to be done, Gip and Carrots and me and Flop were the ones that had a right to do it, but with Flop asleep and Carrots and Gip keeping their mouths shut, I did not see why I should talk, so I did not.

We drank and tried to eat and then tried to play cards afterward, but there was no interest in anything. I felt like a terrible fool, and so did all the others. Everybody all over the country would be laughing in their sleeves at us, and even if they did not know who they were laughing at, we did.

I tried to sleep, but there was no chance. I kept thinking of the old man and of Mary, and of Danny doing a ten stretch that would make a stir bug of him. Honestly I cannot tell you how I felt. But I had never felt that way before, and I know now that instead of just wanting Mary, I wanted Mary to want me.

There was a feeling inside me that when Mary

was ready to take me and could come to me and tell me so, I would be happy. Maybe it was just the feeling that I never could beat a crooked game; maybe it was yellow, on account of the bust we had staged with the help of enough artillery to massage a fort; maybe it was something I could not understand myself.

Whatever it was, I never got over it. I am not over it yet, and I know I never will get over it. It is, as Mary said it would be, inside of me. Perhaps if we had got the Gander dough I might never have felt it, and in that case I am glad we did not get the money.

I tossed around on the cot that night, and outside in the library I could hear guys talking, and their voices seemed strange and the light in the room out there seemed queer. I was even sorry for the wall paper on the walls, just thinking that it had to be there in that town among strangers.

By the time daylight came I had made up my mind to do a thing I never thought I would do, but will never get over being glad I did do. I made up my mind to go home and see Mary and talk with her and see if I could get her ideas straight in my mind.

I have got to hand it to the gang out there—Snift and the others; they played mighty square. While we were eating breakfast Snift told us that he had talked with some of the guys behind the

scenes and they were sorry things had broken as they had and realized maybe it was their fault a little.

"Anyhow," Snift explained, "you guys did your end, an' did it right. We'll kick in with a grand apiece for you just to show you we are on the level an' want you to score somethin' fer the way you worked."

That was fair enough, but it made me see two things mighty clearly. One was that the bosses certainly wanted to keep the gang together, and the other, and most important, was that when business men and bankers use a little common sense they can make it mighty unprofitable for crooks.

If they were going to start being as smart as we were, what was the use of being a gangster? They can always make you look like a sap. And that was when I knew something had started working on me, as Mary said it would, from the inside out. I turned down the thousand dollars.

Tucked away inside my clothes I still had nearly eight hundred dollars, and after breakfast I went out of Snift's place and found a store and got a suit and some clean shirts and things. I put them on right in the store and left the old ones there. Then I went to the station and bought a ticket home. At the station I looked in a mirror and was surprised to find my own face with the same sort of expression I had seen on Mary's when she refused to have me and de-

cided to become a nurse. I mean, it was a set expression, and I knew it came from decision to do a thing because you thought it was best and right. It was the first time I had ever had such a feeling.

The train clicked along pretty fast and yet it could not go fast enough. Thoughts of Mary filled my mind. I saw her in her true light for the first time, and it was funny that I could laugh at the thought of meeting Clancy and the others and taking the rap for what I had done without letting it bother me. I finally decided I could do it just for the light I knew would show in Mary's eyes when I did. Something that surprised me a lot was that I slept well on the train.

The next morning I walked through the home station and, honestly, the very air of the place was different. I glanced over at the window where I had kidded the ticket seller and for two pins I could have gone over and shaken his hand. It was great to be home.

The station dicks were there, but they did not seem to pay any attention to me, and I walked right into the restaurant and ate the best breakfast I ever tasted. After that I went into the barber shop and got fixed up to meet Mary. Just the idea of seeing her gave me a thrill, but when I stopped to think what I was going to tell her, and how she would look when she heard it—well, I knew what it was to feel right and happy.

Outside the station I saw a uniformed cop I knew, but I just walked past him without saying anything. I got into a taxicab and started for the hospital. Honestly, I was more excited over this trip than I was when Gip started the bus out of the garage to go to Gander's Mills.

At the hospital I had to wait for Mary. She was staying next door in the nurses' home, and they told me she was a night superintendent of one of the wards and was sleeping. But I knew she would want to see me, so I asked them to wake her up and tell her I was there. In no time at all the messenger came back to me in the lobby and said that Mary was dressing and would be down in ten minutes. Gee! What a girl!

While I waited I wanted to smoke, so I walked outside and strolled up to the corner and puffed away a cigarette. Then I went back and looked at the clock over at the nurses' home and ten minutes had gone by. There were stairs at one side of the lobby and there was also an elevator, and I tried to watch them both so that I could see Mary as quick as she showed up.

And when she did I got the biggest thrill I ever had in all my life. She had grown so much sweeter and prettier, and in her white uniform she looked almost like an angel to me. Her eyes were wide as could be and in them was a light that even a chump like me could understand. And when you see that

light in a girl's eyes you have seen the best thing on earth, if the girl is one like Mary. Maybe there were people around, but we did not care. You know——

After a minute or two we went into a little parlor and sat down on a divan, and there I told Mary just how I felt and asked her again just what she wanted me to do. She told me the same old thing, and somehow I kind of agreed with her.

"We will go together, Jimmie," she said. "I'll go with you, and we'll face this thing and fight it out, no matter what it brings, and when it is over we will have each other."

"But that ain't fair," I protested to her. "You see, I might get a pretty long stretch, Mary. It ain't fair that you should wait."

"It's you or nobody, Jimmie," she said, quiet-like. "It never could be any other way, and no matter how long it takes, the end will be worth it, because we will be together."

There is no need for me to talk too much about Mary, because that is kind of—well, sacred, with me; but she is a part of this story, and just about the biggest part, too, so I must tell the things she did which affected me most.

An hour after I got to the nurses' home I had found out a lot. My old man, for instance, was back on the docks! Can you beat that? Mary cried a lot as she told me, and I knew even she liked

the old man. I knew I did too. I mean, when a man is a real fighter you have just got to like him in some ways.

"He'll never stay there," I cracked to Mary. "Never. He can't go back to that after all he had."

"But he is back, Jimmie," she said, "and I have seen him down there. But—but——"

"Yeah?" I asked, encouraging her to tell me more.

"You might—never know him, dear," Mary went on. "He has changed. His big shoulders are stooped and they look narrower. His face is lined with deep wrinkles, and his eyes—those eyes that used to shine so bright when he was excited—have faded into a dull glow that seems to utter complaint for words he will not speak."

"They never did send him away, then?" I asked, kind of glad for him.

"No. He fought them off, Jimmie. He was a terrible man, your father—terrible—and they were afraid of him. So he bought his freedom with his silence, but what a freedom he bought! He is the least free man I ever heard of!"

"He ain't in the can, anyway," I muttered.

"Not in prison, no," Mary said softly, "but no prison on earth could uncover for a man the tortures that your father has for his daily reminder. If only he had gone to prison instead of back there to those docks! Back where men he used to control now

control him, and hurl names at him and laugh at his collapse."

"I ain't got no imagination, I guess," I told her; "but if you really want me to go down an' give myself up——"

"I do! I do!" she smiled, and caught my hand in her soft white fingers. "You will come out a man, Jimmie. No matter what they say of prisons, you will come out a man. That is because you are going in a man and I'm sure they never can change you while I am waiting." You bet, she was right.

She went upstairs and changed into some street clothes, and when I told her she ought to have sleep she laughed at me. This, she told me, was the happiest moment of her whole life, and then she talked woman talk and said that she had always known there was manhood and honesty way deep down in me—but I will not go into that part.

On the way downtown I got the idea that once I gave myself up I never would get out until I had done the whole stretch they gave me. With nobody to pull strings, and the name of Murphy to hang onto me, such a thing as bail was hopeless. With that in my mind I figured I had better see the old man if I ever expected to again.

Mary went with me and we did not try to hide in any way. Just one thing I did. From a telephone booth I called the district attorney's office and told them I was coming down and give myself

up. I talked with an assistant, but I made it mighty clear what I was going to do, and after I had explained who I was about a dozen times he finally understood, and I nearly fell out of the booth when he said:

"Forget it, kid. On your way. We don't want you. Why raise a lot of stink now? Take your hat and beat it away some place and just use your brains."

The same old racket, I could see. The same old endless chain of running the government to keep your friends out of trouble and get your enemies into it.

We saw the old man. I hate to tell you about it. He was back where he was when I was a little kid and he had his first hopes of casting aside a truck and being made a district committeeman. I recalled his drinking with the big boss on a fight to the finish and, believe me, they had finished!

Once again his hands were flat and broad and black, and the nails had thickened and had dirt under and around them. His shoulders were just like Mary said; they sagged and drooped, and once or twice when he straightened up he acted like his back hurt him a lot and as though even his own narrowed shoulders were too heavy a load for him to carry.

But his face was worst of all. I hardly knew him. Mary and me walked onto the dock and she pointed him out. He was staggering along wheeling a truck,

and his feet struck the dock like a drunken man's. Other men around him were strong and pushed their load easily. But my old man, once the strongest of them all, had a hard time to keep his load moving fast enough to keep out of the way.

The bones of his face stuck way out now, or else his eyes had sunk way in. His cheeks hung flabby, and seemed to fall into his mouth like his teeth were all gone. A funny yellow color made him look sick all the time, and in his tattered and stained work clothes he did not look much like the man I had seen mixing whisky with siphon water.

When he saw us he straightened up and one of his hands went to his back like he had an ache there. For a second he looked at us just blankly, then something of the old fire came back into his foggy eyes and he walked toward us, his one hand still resting on his hip.

"Hello, kid," he grinned, trying to look like he used to look when the breaks were all his way. I could see he was shamed to the core of him, and fighting to hide it from me. "Well, well," he went on. "If you ain't lookin' pretty good, too—but you better beat it outa here!"

You know, maybe it was sentiment, on account of Mary, but something swelled up in my throat and my eyes got misty and I could not answer him. He held out his hand to shake, and I liked him for that. I gripped his hand and he laughed a little bit.

"Remember the time I told you to keep away from this brat?" he cracked, looking queerly at Mary. I nodded. "She's a wonder, this frail," he muttered, by way of showing me his changed view —"a little wonder. . . . Say, where'n the devil have you been?"

"I beat it away after election," I managed to crack.

"Yeah? Quite a fight, that alderman thing," he said bitterly. "I had the crooks licked, too, but fer Clancy goin' wrong on me. I'm proud an' glad you plugged that crook, kid. An' it's a sure shot they had to bring the whole town down here to elect Nolan!"

I knew he was right, and I was a little proud when he straightened up and looked a tiny bit like he used to. After a minute he turned away from us a little and said again: "You better oscar outa here, kid. I ain't got the pull I used to have. They might like to pick you up, you know. Look what they done to that little rat Critch—a ten stretch, kid; just a ten stretch for that rat!"

"I seen it in the papers," I grunted.

Before we could say more a big bum wearing a derby hat and tan shoes came along the dock. He saw us and stopped. For a minute he stood there, his hands on his hips like he was hardly able to believe what he saw. Then he spat a big stream of tobacco juice over the dock and into the river, pushed

his derby back with one hand, and started toward us.

The old man saw him and his shoulders dropped again and he kind of slunk away from us like a cat does from a garbage can. The bird in the derby stopped and watched him, and after the old man had struggled to get his truck lifted and under way again, I heard the foreman say:

"By Gawd, Murphy, it's about time you wrassled that wagon a bit! Wha'd'ye think this is, a sociable?"

Something inside me burned just like it did that election day when I went after Clancy. I started toward this foreman, but Mary caught my arm.

"Not that, Jimmie," she begged me; "only your father is to blame. He brought this on himself. He never will relent. He hates too much and he fights too much and always he defeats himself. This is just the price he pays, and the sad part is he began paying too late. You will be different."

We turned away. I think I have said before that the worst, or the best, idea of hell I ever could get was the idea of my old man being back on the docks. Well, I repeat that, now that I have seen him there. And yet he would fight—fight even when there was no chance to win. He was the greatest fighter I ever knew; yet he was not fighter enough to beat defeat.

Mary and I turned away to go to the district attorney, and if I ever need anything more to convince me that Mary was right all the time she was

begging me to pay the price and start over, all it need be is that picture of my father staggering away behind that truck, with his back bent almost double and his hands sore and scarred and his hips narrow and jerking—jerking just like every move hurt him.

XV

MARY was dead game when we got down to the district attorney's office. I mean, it was the kind of gameness that really is game. It was just beginning to come to me that I was more to Mary than anything ever had been to me, and yet she was willing to see me go away just to help me.

We had to fight to get a chance to talk. Two or three young saps that were assistants talked to us and then turned us over to somebody else. One of them even tried to flirt with Mary, and I guess he turned us over to someone else because I told him I would bust him on the nose for being too fresh.

But finally they understood who I was, and then they began to look serious and I began to think I was due for twenty years. But there was a laugh in that serious business. What they really were worrying about, as I found out afterward, was that I might do something to worry their boss. They wanted no part of that!

I being Murphy's son and Murphy having dickered pretty hard to keep himself out of jail, my appearance might open a lot of old wounds, I suppose. I guess they thought maybe I was just show-

ing up so that the old man could make a try to come back on the publicity I would get.

But whatever it was, it got us into the office of the big boss, and he looked me over like I was poison.

"Since when," he cracked, "have you got religion?"

"It isn't religion," Mary said—"that is, not the kind you mean. Jimmie wants to pay his debt to society and come out a real man, facing the world ——"

"Hell!" the district attorney cracked disgustedly.

"Watch your language before this lady," I told him, because he made me sore swearing in front of Mary.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he gasped, his eyes opening like a camera shutter, and almost as quick. I mean, some guys cannot act like gentlemen to save their souls.

"I'll say you will," I grunted, "an' it's to save myself that very thing that I'm here. Not that I'm yellow. It ain't that, because Mary an' I are agreed I don't crack a thing about friends of mine. But I'll take the rap comin' to me, an' when it's done Mary an' I will be to ourselves——"

"And get married and live happily ever after," the district attorney sneered. It was easy to see that he did not quite understand my coming there to take the rap. It struck him, I guess, as the most

unexpected thing in the world, and I did not hold that much against him, because, until a few hours before, I had felt the same way myself.

"That's just exactly it," Mary said all calm and pretty; "just exactly." She was carrying a little pocketbook, and she had it in her lap as we sat there, and I could see her hands toying with it a little nervously as she watched the district attorney.

"I don't see," the boss grunted after a minute, "why you two don't beat it and take a good break when you get it."

"Then you don't see your duty," Mary cracked, and I just about toppled right off the chair. I mean, if this bird wanted to hang me high and dry, I figured he could do it. So right away I started to calm him down:

"She don't mean that just like it sounds," I began, but he cut right in:

"That's just it. She does mean it! I'd never in the world believe that you were on the level with a racket like this, Murphy—there's too much of your old man's blood in you—but anybody with the nerve to say that to me is on the level, and no doubt she thinks you are."

"I am," I told him. "You never laid a finger on me, did you? I'm here of my own free will!"

"I never wanted you, you jackass!" he bellowed. "I'll get any man I want!"

"Well, we can't fight, boss." I said that because

there was no sense in making him sore. I had begun to suspect, though, that I had already made him sore just by showing up. He was afraid that the talk which I might start would uncover too much.

"All I want to do," I told him, "is confess my end of what I've done an' leave the rest to you. I won't make any trouble, you can bet on that."

"Oh, a confession for the good of the soul, eh?" he sneered again. "Well, confess!" He pushed a button on his desk and pretty soon a man came in carrying a pad. To him the boss said:

"Harry, take this lad out and get his story. Take it down and bring me all the copies. I don't want anybody else to get a look at it until I say so."

The fellow took Mary and me into a little room, and I sat at a table and, with Mary holding my hand and squeezing my fingers every little while just to encourage me, I gave them the story that I figured would put the rap on me plenty.

I admitted robbing the dock foreman and robbing the wop fruit store. I admitted being with the mob that bumped off the driver, and I admitted shooting Clancy. But I never cracked another name, and I stated, while this fellow Harry wrote, that I never would.

After all those things, I said I had taken part with others in a holdup recently in another city, but that we got no money out of it. Then, Mary helping me a little, I told why I had come back to confess. I

asked that I be sentenced in the judgment of the court and be given a chance to take the rap and come out to Mary.

It was not a very long statement, after all. But the stuff in it could total up a life stretch. I felt pretty shaky while I waited for the thing to be typed, and I smoked a lot of cigarettes and held Mary's hand, and once or twice, because Harry left us in that little room alone, I took her in my arms and kissed her and we cried together. Yes, I cried. I mean—well——

Finally Harry came back and took us to the boss again. He handed over my statement and the boss read it over with a frown on his face and wrinkles across his forehead an inch deep. Nobody ever could convince me that bird was on the level. The things that always worry crooks most are the unexpected things, and he was suspicious of this move on my part.

"Let me think this confession over awhile," he said, after finishing it. "Come back in about two hours."

"You'll keep me here," I said, thinking I was pinched; "but Mary works at night—she's a nurse —an' she needs some rest."

"Hell, no!" he cracks, "I won't keep you. Beat it out. Take a walk for yourselves. If I never see you again that'll be twenty minutes too soon!"

Well, figure that one for yourself!

Mary and me walked around the streets for a while and we kept talking about what we would do after the whole thing was over, and it was quite a while before I realized she was saying a lot of things just to keep me braced up. I mean, if Flop Gannon had had a girl like Mary he never would have needed dope.

When we went back the district attorney kept us waiting until the afternoon was almost gone and big, creeping shadows filled the halls of the old building where he had his office. When we finally got to him I knew right away that he had come to a decision and laid out a plan of action. He went after me like a tiger:

"I'll hand it to you," he admitted, his voice hard and his eyes glittering. "I've really got to hand it to you, and if this girl is the brains that schemed it all out, she's the smartest moll I ever met!"

I looked at him like he was crazy, and Mary was speechless. "Yep," he continued, "it's smooth stuff. What's the real idea, now, kid? Have you pulled off a fast one that you're afraid we'll catch up with soon? Are you trying to do this reform gag for the sympathy of the courts and get yourself off easy just because the boys are close behind you?"

"Not a chance," I told him. "I've put everything I ever did right into that statement, an' I give you my word, boss, that I'm on the level. I've found out the game can't be beat an' I'm through tryin'.

I admit I don't want the rap, but I'll take it for Mary, because she won't have me unless I do."

"You know you lie!" he snarled, at the same time getting up from his chair and pacing up and down the room. Suddenly he whirled back to his desk and snatched up a bunch of papers.

"Every witness dead!" he shouts at me. "Not a shred of proof that would convict you! Yet you spring a confession on me and then stand back and laugh! You can't confess murder—the law won't let you—and you've already been tried in the case you mention. God knows, if we couldn't convict you then, we can't now!

"These cheap, little, petty robberies of a dock foreman and a wop fruiterer! What have you given us? Just a sweet out for yourself! In one simple gesture you make of yourself the reformed gunman and the free yegg! . . . Signed a contract to lecture, have you?"

I mean, that knocked me flat! The prosecutor was waving the papers around before our faces and neither Mary nor myself could crack a thing; there was not anything to crack. We were speechless.

"Every one of these cases are reviewed right in this batch of papers," he raved along. "We dug them out when we were fighting your old man. And you are smart enough to know that. I wouldn't take a single case against you into court! It would be a waste of the people's money!"

As soon as he cracked that about wasting the people's money I knew he was on the queer. That lingo always makes me suspicious. Most of the people have not got any money anyway, and those that have know how to save it for themselves. They do not need a bent mug to do it for them. Imagine this scary district attorney posing as a defender of the people's money. Bunk!

"Now," he raged on, "you come in here like a sweet and innocent convert and ask to pay to society the price you owe it. Your old man is back of all this! You can go back and tell him to lay off or I'll—I'll—I mean, tell him to be a man and forget old scores. He played the game and he lost—ain't he man enough to take a licking?"

"But his father," Mary cut in, "has nothing to do with this! Jimmie is doing it for me. I've insisted upon it for years. We love each other——"

"Then for heaven's sake go and get married and shut up about it. Nobody will bother this kid!"

"But that is not what we want. Jimmie must pay his price."

"To society?" the district attorney sneered again.

"To society," Mary said firmly.

"Well," he cracked, mad and disturbed and suspicious all at once, "society pays me a fancy salary for collecting its debts. I say to you that Murphy

has paid. Everything is even. You don't owe society a thing. On your way rejoicing!"

He tore up my statement and threw the little pieces into a waste basket. I could have shouted with glee. But one look at Mary took the laugh off my face.

"He has not paid, and there is a debt, Mr. District Attorney," she said steadily. "You have no idea of what this means to me. It means equally much to Jimmie. It isn't just that I want him to square a debt; it's the actual paying of it that counts, and the thoughts that will come to Jimmie while he is paying——"

"I refuse to prosecute," the district attorney cracked with a majestic wave of the hand. "I wouldn't even bring these cases before a grand jury. There is no chance of conviction."

His hat and coat were hanging on a tree in the corner of the office and he walked over to them and put them both on, regardless of Mary being in the room. She stood up, and as I looked at her she was biting her lower lip and tears made her eyes look kind of swampy and swimmy.

"But you must listen," she pleaded. "You don't understand——"

"Go ahead, tell me the law now," he taunted her. "I know what a court and a dumb jury requires to convict a young guy like this yegg, and I know what a chance I would have of doing it with

a pretty romance thrown in their faces and a kid like you mooning around the courtroom as Exhibit A to Z!"

With those words he flung the door open and Harry came in and started working with the papers on his desk. "Let these people out, Harry," the boss cracked, and then he was gone. . . .

XVI

BUT still, I am doing time. Mary saw to that. She did it in a way all her own, and because of the wonderful girl she is and the wonderful way she worked things out, I had better tell you that brief part of the story before I stop.

Even when the district attorney showed his hand, Mary did not quit. She really wanted me to pay, and the fact that I had shown I was willing to was not enough.

"It is just the difference between thinking about a thing and doing it," she said. "Some day, if God is good to us, there will be a little Jimmie, and the fact that I long to go through that will never put real mother love in my heart. It is the doing of it that means everything, Jimmie—the actual paying of the price—and I never would feel safe about you otherwise."

Well, that was and still is a little deep for me, but it is what she said, and I would take her word for anything under the sun. So the next afternoon she took another step. I could see she was fighting for better than her life, and right then, in a quiet sort of way, she could have given my old man lessons.

All on her own she fixed it up to see Judge Cond. He met us in his chambers at the courthouse. He was a nice old codger, this Cond, but there was a nasty light in his eyes at times, and when they looked straight at you they seemed to make his white eyebrows bristle like the hair on a wolf's neck.

The backs of his hands were yellowed and the veins stood up, and there were freckles on them. I know, because while Mary told him our story he took one of her hands between his and rubbed it and patted it, and I guess he made Mary feel like she had found a second father.

"Of course," he said, when Mary had finished the story and I had kicked in with what the cops call corroboration, "this is a strange and unusual story. I can see the district attorney's side and, in spite of the unusual angle, I can see yours.

"It is very hard to convict a criminal these days —altogether too hard. There are so many technicalities of the law and so much difficulty in gathering an impartial jury, that the point of the district attorney is well taken.

"But this little girl"—looking at me with his eyebrows white and bristling—"is quite right in her attitude. I want you to give me your word of honor that you will tell me the truth about something."

"I do," I cracked. "Honest, judge, I'm all for this racket. Mary has the right angle an' I'm set to go through."

"Very good. Then answer this: Is there any major crime of which you have not told the district attorney, but which you fear he will discover?"

"I've shot the works," I told him, "told the whole business, and that's on my word of honor."

"You understand, Murphy," he said, "that what you say or do now would in no wise render you immune to trial and punishment for such crime if it existed and you were later indicted for it?"

"Sure."

"Then you may leave this thing with me," the judge said, "and if you care to come back here day after tomorrow at this time, I will see what I can do."

We left, and I stayed at a little hotel near the hospital. It is a fact that I felt a lot better, even though I had switched around and was finding it harder to get into jail than it used to be to stay out of it.

Mary and me made a lot of plans about after I got out. She was making good money already and told me how much she could save and how she would save it and start small and furnish a little place where we would be by ourselves.

"After you do this thing, Jimmie," she kept telling me, "it will not be hard to get a start for you. I'm sure Judge Cond would recommend you after you come out. He knows you are honest in your plans now."

"The day when I get out may be a long, long way off," I cracked.

"But it will come—that is the principal thing," she said.

Judge Cond gave us half an hour when we saw him again. He told us that the thing to do was to confess again to his court stenographer and that he would then let me go in charge of Mary. When he was ready to bring me up for sentence, he said, he would let Mary know. So we did that.

The grand jury was in session and the judge was wise enough to see to it that I was indicted on the confession and cited in his court. The district attorney made no kick after talking with the judge. You can see how that would be. He had to fight cases in the judge's court and he knew his onions.

Ten days after I came back to the home town Mary and me showed in court to plead to the indictment. Judge Cond did not make me plead in open court. He tried me in secret session out in the chambers where we had first met him.

The indictment of the grand jury was read and the judge asked me did I want a lawyer.

"No, sir," I cracked.

"You have heard the reading of this indictment," he rattled off. "How plead you, James Murphy, guilty or not guilty to the indictment as read?"

"Guilty, sir," I said, but nobody will ever know how much I wanted to make a fight over the thing.

It was all so solemn that I just about lost my nerve, and to make it all the harder, just as I cracked that thing, Mary sobbed behind me.

"The court," Judge Cond said, "has reviewed this case with a great interest. There are, so far as we see, no extenuating circumstances past the fact that this defendant was born into an environment sordid with crime and conducive to a criminal career.

"Any leniency that the court may show, however, does not predicate itself upon that fact. This young man has made himself a common menace to society and the court is not unmindful of that fact. There is no excuse for crime, though there be many reasons for it.

"On the other hand, he also, through the influence of others, has shown a disposition to pay his debt to society and, after having done so, resume life as a useful and honorable citizen. It is not within the province of any man to deny another man that opportunity.

"It has been said that the honest administration of justice is the first pillar of government. No justice untempered by mercy is justice. The fact that this defendant stands willingly before the bar to answer for his derelictions, even though the prosecuting attorney has frankly admitted the fact that he cannot convict him of crime, sways the court heavily in favor of the defendant.

"It is, therefore, the order of this court that James

Murphy, the defendant, assume an indeterminate sentence of from three to fifteen years penal servitude, but that, provided the conduct of the prisoner is exemplary and no further violations than those cited in the present indictment against him are forthcoming, he shall be paroled, at the expiration of three years' portion of the sentence just imposed, in the custody of Mary Edna Dix."

So that is that.

There, as the movies here in the prison sometimes say, is the situation. I came up here and started doing my time. I had been here only about five days when I met Danny Critch in the yard, and he told me that Clancy had double-crossed him on a job just to save himself, but that he would be sprung out of the can through Nolan and Clancy long before his ten-year stretch was up.

Well, maybe he will. But what he springs into will be worse than staying here in the big house. I am beginning to see just what Mary meant by paying, because I have been here eighteen months and only have that far to go, and already Mary has got a joint with a little furniture in it, and she lives there, and by the time I get out it ought to be a real little home.

Judge Cond is going to get me a job, he says, and I know he will. That will start me to paying Mary for the furniture, and between loving Mary and paying for furniture, I guess I will be busy enough

to be happy, and I know one thing sure, and so does Mary. Something has changed inside me. It is just like she said it would be.

I do not want to seem weak and yellow and preachy, but that is the cold turkey of the thing. I really mean it. And even the warden here says I will do well when I get out, because I am smart. He says that because I just happened to stumble over something in the line of supplies when I was put to work unloading incoming trucks in the prison yard.

You see, it was almost like the first racket I ever pulled down there on the docks. They checked in more cases than they got.

"You will do well," the head screw told me when I just happened to mention this to him. "When you crash out you will do well. You have an eye to business."

And the very next day I was handed a soft spot in the library, and on visiting days Mary comes to me and tells me what to read.

I guess that is all.

THE END

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JERRY, OF THE ISLANDS

MICHAEL, BROTHER OF JERRY

SEA WOLF, THE

SMOKE BELLEW

SON OF THE WOLF, THE

VALLEY OF THE MOON, THE

WHITE FANG

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